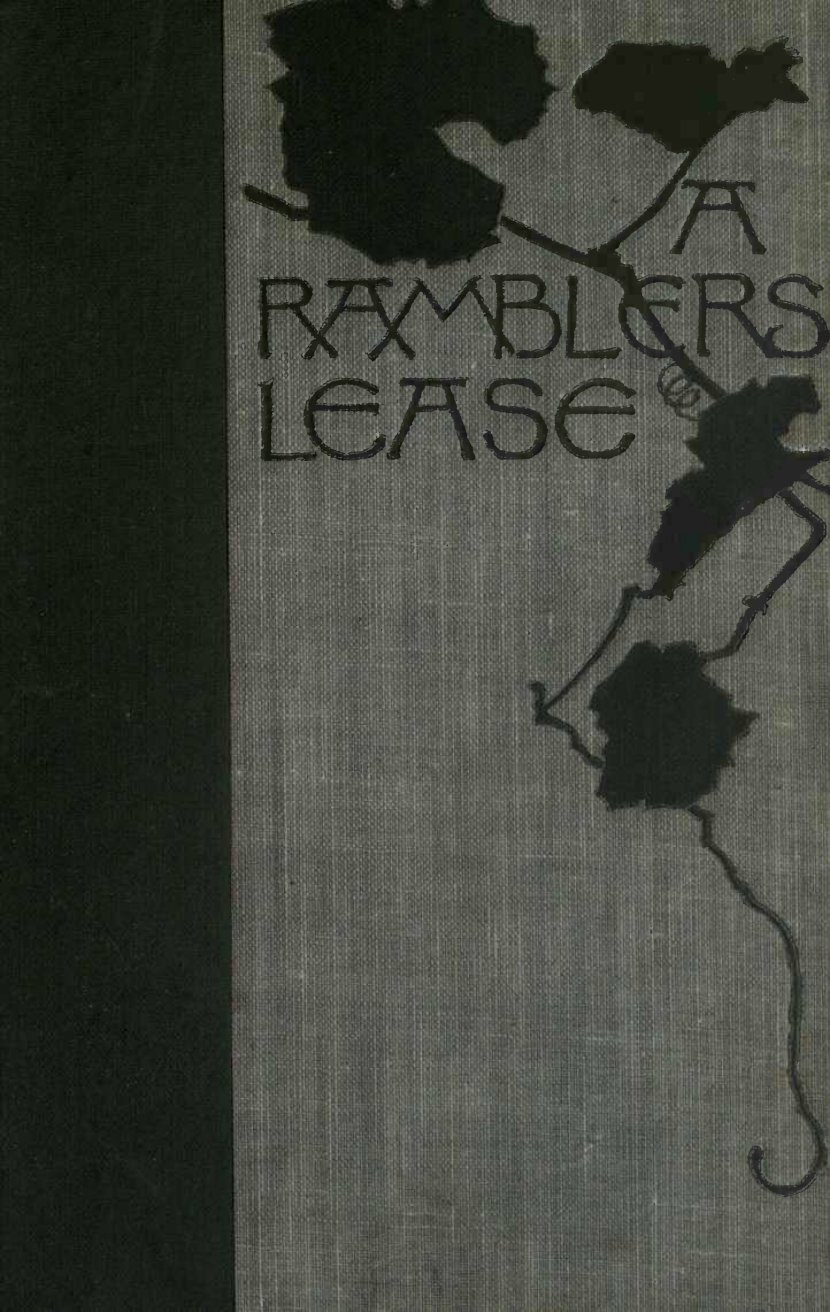
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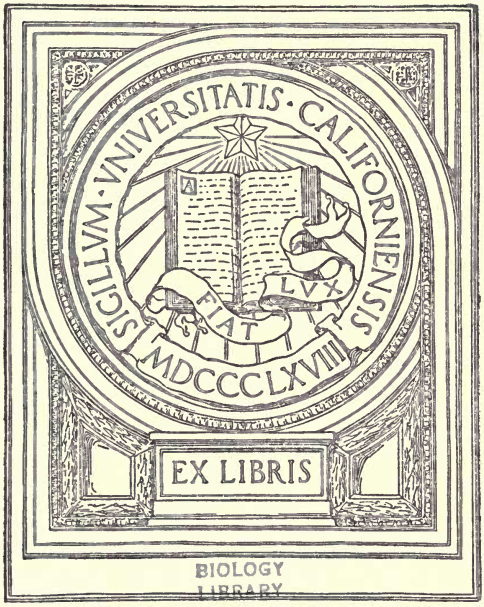

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A RAMBLER'S LEASE

BY

BRADFORD TORREY

I have known many laboring men that have got good estates in this valley. — BUNYAN

Sunbeams, shadows, butterflies, and birds. — WORDSWORTH

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1892

matter, he cannot help thinking that some of his more prosperous neighbors would do well, in legal phrase, to perfect their titles. He would gladly be of service to them in this regard.

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tively unremunerative. Here in New England (I know not what may be true elsewhere) there is a class of people whom it is common to hear gossiped about compassionately as "land poor." But, however scanty the income to be derived from it, a landed investment is at least substantial. It will never fail its possessor entirely. If it starve him, it will offer him a grave. It has the prime quality of permanence. At the very worst, it will last as long as it is needed. Railroads may be "wrecked," banks be broken, governments become bankrupt, and we be left to mourn; but when the earth departs we shall go with it. Yes, the ancient form of speech is correct, — land is *real;* as the modern phrase goes, translating Latin into Saxon, land is *the thing;* and though we can scarcely reckon it among the necessaries of life, since so many do without it, we may surely esteem it one of the least dispensable of luxuries.

But I was beginning to speak of my tax-bill, and must not omit to mention a further advantage of real estate over other forms of property. It is certain not to be overlooked by the town assessors. Its pro-

prietor is never shut up to the necessity of either advertising his own good fortune, or else submitting to pay less than his rightful share of the public expenses, — a merciful deliverance, for in such a strait, where either modesty or integrity must go to the wall, it is hard for human nature to be sure of itself.

To my thinking there is no call upon a man's purse which should be responded to with greater alacrity than this of the tax-gatherer. In what cause ought we to spend freely, if not in that of home and country? I have heard, indeed, of some who do not agree with me in this feeling. Possibly tax-rates are now and then exorbitant. Possibly, too, my own view of the subject might be different were my quota of the public levy more considerable. This year, for instance, I am called upon for seventy-three cents; if the demand were for as many dollars, who knows whether I might not welcome it with less enthusiasm? On such a point it would be unbecoming for me to speak. Enough that even with my fraction of a dollar I am able to rejoice that I have a share in all the town's multifa-

rious outlay. If an additional fire-engine is bought, or a new school-house built, or the public library replenished, it is done in part out of my pocket.

Here, however, let me make a single exception. I seldom go home (such language still escapes me involuntarily) without finding that one or another of the old roads has been newly repaired. I hope that no mill of my annual seventy or eighty cents goes into work of that sort. The roads — such as I have in mind — are out of the way and little traveled, and, in my opinion, were better left to take care of themselves. There is no artist but will testify that a crooked road is more picturesque than a straight one; while a natural border of alder bushes, grape-vines, Roxbury wax-work, Virginia creeper, wild cherry, and such like is an inexpensive decoration of the very best sort, such as the Village Improvement Society ought never to allow any highway surveyor to lay his hands on, unless in some downright exigency. What a short-sighted policy it is that provides for the comfort of the feet, but makes no account of those more intellectual and spir-

itual pleasures which enter through the eye! It may be answered, I know, that in matters of general concern it is necessary to consult the greatest good of the greatest number; and that, while all the inhabitants of the town are supplied with feet, comparatively few of them have eyes. There is force in this, it must be admitted. Possibly the highway surveyor (the highwayman, I was near to writing) is not so altogether wrong in his "improvements." At all events, it is not worth while for me to make the question one of conscience, and go to jail rather than pay my taxes, as Thoreau did. Let it suffice to enter my protest. Whatever others may desire, for myself, as often as I revisit W——, I wish to be able to repeat with unction the words of W——'s only poet,[1] —

"How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood!"

And how am I to do that, if the "scenes" have been modernized past recognition?

[1] Since this essay was originally published (in the *Atlantic Monthly*) I have been assured that the author of *The Old Oaken Bucket* was not born in W——, but in the next town. Being convinced against my will, however, and finding the biographical dictionaries divided upon the point, I conclude to let the text stand unaltered.

My own landed possessions are happily remote from roads. Not till long after my day will the "tide of progress" bring them "into the market," as the real-estate brokers are fond of saying. I have never yet been troubled with the importunities of would-be purchasers. Indeed, it is a principal recommendation of woodland property that one's sense of proprietorship is so little liable to be disturbed. I often reflect how altered the case would be were my fraction of an acre in some peculiarly desirable location near the centre of the village. Then I could hardly avoid knowing that the neighbors were given to speculating among themselves about my probable selling price; once in a while I should be confronted with a downright offer; and what assurance could I feel that somebody would not finally tempt me beyond my strength, and actually buy me out? As it is, my land is mine; and, unless extreme poverty overtakes me, mine it is reasonably certain to remain, till death shall separate us.

Whatever contributes to render life interesting and enjoyable goes so far toward

making difficult its final inevitable surrender; and it must be confessed that the thought of my wood-lot increases my otherwise natural regret at being already so well along on my journey. In a sense I feel my own existence to be bound up with that of my pine-trees; or, to speak more exactly, that their existence is bound up with mine. For it is a sort of unwritten but inexorable law in W——, as in fact it appears to be throughout New England, that no pine must ever be allowed to reach more than half its normal growth; so that my trees are certain to fall under the axe as soon as their present owner is out of the way. I am not much given to superstition. There are no longer any dryads, it is to be presumed; and if there were, it is not clear that they would be likely to take up with pines; but for all that, I cherish an almost affectionate regard for any trees with which I have become familiar. I have mourned the untimely fate of many; and now, seeing that I have been entrusted with the guardianship of these few, I hold myself under a kind of sacred obligation to live as long as possible, for their sakes.

It is now a little less than a fortnight since I paid them a visit. The path runs through the wood for perhaps half a mile; and, as I sauntered along, I heard every few rods the thump of falling acorns, though there was barely wind enough to sway the tree-tops. "Mother Earth has begun her harvesting in good earnest," I thought. The present is what the squirrels call a good year. They will laugh and grow fat. Their oak orchards have seldom done better, the chestnut oaks in particular, the handsome, rosy-tipped acorns of which are noticeably abundant.

This interesting tree, so like the chestnut itself in both bark and leaf, is unfortunately not to be found in my own lot; at any rate, I have never discovered it there, although it grows freely only a short distance away. But I have never explored the ground with anything like thoroughness, and, to tell the truth, am not at all certain that I know just where the boundaries run. In this respect my real estate is not unlike my intellectual possessions; concerning which I often find it impossible to determine what is actually mine and what

another's. I have written an essay before now, and at the end been more or less in doubt where to set the quotation marks. For that matter, indeed, I incline to believe that the whole tract of woods in the midst of which my little spot is situated belongs to me quite as really as to the various persons who claim the legal ownership. Not many of these latter, I am confident, get a better annual income from the property than I do; and even in law, we are told, possession counts for nine points out of the ten. They are never to be found at home when I call, and I feel no scruple about carrying away whatever I please. My treasures, be it said, however, are chiefly of an impalpable sort, — mostly thoughts and feelings, though with a few flowers and ferns now and then; the one set about as valuable as the other, the proprietors of the land would probably think.

In one aspect of the case, the lot which is more strictly my own is just now in a very interesting condition, though one that, unhappily, is far from being uncommon. Except the pines already mentioned (only six or eight in number), the wood was en-

tirely cut off a few years before I came into possession, and at present the place is covered with a thicket of vines, bushes, and young trees, all engaged in an almost desperate struggle for existence. When the ground was cleared, every seed in it bestirred itself and came up; others made haste to enter from without; and ever since then the battle has been going on. It is curious to consider how changed the appearance of things will be at the end of fifty years, should nature be left till then to take its course. By that time the contest will for the most part be over. At least nineteen twentieths of all the plants that enlisted in the fight will have been killed, and where now is a dense mass of shrubbery will be a grove of lordly trees, with the ground underneath broad-spaced and clear. A noble result; but achieved at what a cost! If one were likely himself to live so long, it would be worth while to catalogue the species now in the field, for the sake of comparing the list with a similar one of half a century later. The contrast would be an impressive sermon on the mutability of mundane things. But we shall

be past the need of preaching, most of us, before that day arrives, and not unlikely shall have been ourselves preached about in enforcement of the same trite theme.

Thoughts of this kind came to me the other afternoon, as I stood in the path (what is known as the town path cuts the lot in two) and looked about. So much was going on in this bit of earth, itself the very centre of the universe to multitudes of living things. The city out of which I had come was not more densely populous. Here at my elbow stood a group of sassafras saplings, remnants of a race that has held the ground for nobody knows how long. One of my earliest recollections of the place is of coming hither to dig for fragrant roots. At that time it had never dawned upon me that the owner of the land would some day die, and leave it to me, his heir. How hard and rocky the ground was! And how hard we worked for a very little bark! Yet few of my pleasures have lasted better. The spicy taste is in my mouth still. Even in those days I remarked the glossy green twigs of this elegant species, as well as the unique and beautiful variety of its leaves,

— some entire and oval, others mitten-shaped, and others yet three-lobed; an extremely pretty bit of originality, suiting admirably with the general comely habit of this tree. There are some trees, as some men, that seem born to dress well.

Along with the sassafras I was delighted to find one or two small specimens of the flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), — another original genius, and one which I now for the first time became acquainted with as a tenant of my own. Its deeply veined leaves are not in any way remarkable (unless it be for their varied autumnal tints), and are all fashioned after one pattern. Its blossoms, too, are small and inconspicuous; but these it sets round with large white bracts (universally mistaken for petals by the uninitiated), and in flowering time it is beyond comparison the showiest tree in the woods, while its fruit is the brightest of coral red. I hope these saplings of mine may hold their own in the struggle for life, and be flourishing in all their beauty when my successor goes to look at them fifty years hence.

Having spoken of the originality of the

sassafras and the dogwood, I must not fail to mention their more abundant neighbor, the witch-hazel, or hamamelis. In comparison with its wild freak of singularity, the modest idiosyncrasies of the other two seem almost conventional. Why, if not for sheer oddity's sake, should any bush in this latitude hold back its blossoms till near the edge of winter? As I looked at the half-grown buds, clustered in the axils of the yellow leaves, they appeared to be waiting for the latter to fall, that they might have the sunlight all to themselves. They will need it, one would say, in our bleak November weather.

Overfull of life as my wild garden patch was, it would not have kept its (human) possessor very long from starvation. One or two barberry bushes made a brave show of fruitfulness; but the handsome clusters were not yet ripe, and even at their best they are more ornamental than nutritive, — though, after the frost has cooked them, one may go farther and fare worse. A few stunted maple-leaved viburnums (*this* plant's originality is imitative, — a not uncommon sort, by the bye) proffered scanty

cymes of dark purplish drupes. Here and there was a spike of red berries, belonging to the false Solomon's-seal or false spikenard (what a pity this worthy herb should not have some less negative title!); but these it would have been a shame to steal from the grouse. Not far off a single black alder was reddening its fruit, which all the while it hugged close to the stem, as if in dread lest some chance traveler should be attracted by the bright color. It need not have trembled, for this time at least. I had just dined, and was tempted by nothing save two belated blackberries, the very last of the year's crop, and a single sassafras leaf, mucilaginous and savory, admirable as a relish. A few pigeon-berries might have been found, I dare say, had I searched for them, and possibly a few sporadic checkerberries; while right before my eyes was a vine loaded with large bunches of very small frost-grapes, such as for hardness would have served well enough for school-boys' marbles. Everything has its favorable side, however; and probably the birds counted it a blessing that the grapes *were* small and hard and sour; else

greedy men would have come with baskets and carried them all away. Except some scattered rose-hips, I have enumerated everything that looked edible, I believe, though a hungry man's eyes might have lengthened the list materially. The cherry-trees, hickories, and oaks were not yet in bearing, as the horticultural phrase is; but I was glad to run upon a clump of bayberry bushes, which offer nothing good to eat, to be sure, but are excellent to smell of. The leaves always seem to invite crushing, and I never withhold my hand.

Among the crowd of young trees — scrub oaks, red oaks, white oaks, cedars, ashes, hickories, birches, maples, aspens, sumachs, and hornbeams — was a single tupelo. The distinguished name honors my catalogue, but I am half sorry to have it there. For, with all its sturdiness, the tupelo does not bear competition, and I foresee plainly that my unlucky adventurer will inevitably find itself overshadowed by more rapid growers, and be dwarfed and deformed, if not killed outright. Some of the very strongest natures (and the remark is of general application) require to be planted

in the open, where they can be free to develop in their own way and at leisure. But this representative of *Nyssa multiflora* took the only chance that offered, I presume, as the rest of us must do.

Happy the humble! who aspire not to lofty things, demanding the lapse of years for their fulfillment, but are content to set before themselves some lesser task, such as the brevity of a single season may suffice to accomplish. Here were the asters and golden-rods already finishing their course in glory, while the tupelo was still barely getting under way in a race which, however prolonged, was all but certain to terminate in failure. Of the golden-rods I noted four species, including the white — which might appropriately be called silvery-rod — and the blue-stemmed. The latter (*Solidago cæsia*) is to my eye the prettiest of all that grow with us, though it is nearly the least obtrusive. It is rarely, if ever, found outside of woods, and ought to bear some name (sylvan golden-rod, perhaps) indicative of the fact.

As a rule, fall flowers have little delicacy and fragrance. They are children of

the summer; and, loving the sun, have had almost an excess of good fortune. With such pampering, it is no wonder they grow rank and coarse. They would be more than human, I was going to say, if they did not. It is left for stern winter's progeny, the blossoms of early spring-time, who struggle upward through the snow and are blown upon by chilly winds, — it is left for these gentle creatures, at once so hardy and so frail, to illustrate the sweet uses of adversity.

All in all, it was a motley company which I beheld thus huddled together in my speck of forest clearing. Even the lands beyond the sea were represented, for here stood mullein and yarrow, contesting the ground with oaks and hickories. The smaller wood flowers were not wanting, of course, though none of them were now in bloom. Pyrola and winter-green, violets (the common blue sort and the leafy-stemmed yellow), strawberry and five-finger, saxifrage and columbine, rock-rose and bed-straw, self-heal and wood-sorrel, — these, and no doubt many more, were there, filling the chinks otherwise unoccupied.

My assortment of ferns is small, but I noted seven species: the brake, the polypody, the hay-scented, and four species of shield-ferns, — *Aspidium Noveboracense*, *Aspidium spinulosum*, variety *intermedium*, *Aspidium marginale*, and the Christmas fern, *Aspidium acrostichoides*. The last named is the one of which I am proudest. For years I have been in the habit of coming hither at Christmas time to gather the fronds, which are then as bright and fresh as in June. Two of the others, the polypody and *Aspidium marginale*, are evergreen also, but they are coarser in texture and of a less lively color. Writing of these flowerless beauties, I am tempted to exclaim again, "Happy the humble!" The brake is much the largest and stoutest of the seven, but it is by a long time the first to be cut down before the frost.

Should I ever meet with reverses, as the wealthiest and most prudent are liable to do, and be compelled to part with my woodland inheritance, I shall count it expedient to seek a purchaser in the spring. At that season its charms are greatly enhanced by a lively brook. This comes

tumbling down the hill-side, dashing against the bowlders (of which the land has plenty), and altogether acting like a thing not born to die ; but alas, the early summer sees it make an end, to wait the melting of next winter's snow. Many a happy hour did I, as a youngster, pass upon its banks, watching with wonder the swarms of tiny insects which darkened the foam and the snow, and even filmed the surface of the brook itself. I marveled then, as I do now, why such creatures should be out so early. Possibly our very prompt March friend, the phœbe, could suggest an explanation.

A break in the forest is of interest not only to such plants as I have been remarking upon, but also to various species of birds. No doubt the towhee, the brown thrush, and the cat-bird found out this spot years ago, and have been using it ever since for summer quarters. Indeed, a cat-bird snarled at me for an intruder this very September afternoon, though he himself was most likely nothing more than a chance pilgrim going South. This member of the noble wren family and near cousin of the

mocking-bird would be better esteemed if he were to drop that favorite feline call of his. But this is his bit of originality (imitative, like the maple-leaved viburnum's), and perhaps, if justice were done, it would be put down to his credit rather than made an occasion of ill-will.

Once during the afternoon a company of chickadees happened in upon me; and, taking my cue from the newspaper folk, I immediately essayed an interview. My imitation of their conversational notes was hardly begun before one of the birds flew toward me, and, alighting near by, proceeded to answer my calls with a mimicry so exact, as fairly to be startling. To all appearance the quick-witted fellow had taken the game into his own hands. Instead of my deceiving him, he would probably go back and entertain his associates with amusing accounts of how cleverly he had fooled a stranger, out yonder in the bushes.

It would have seemed a graceful and appropriate acknowledgment of my rightful ownership of the land on which the catbird and the titmice were foraging, had

they greeted me with songs. But it would hardly have been courteous for me to propose the matter, and evidently it did not occur to them. At all events, I heard no music except the hoarse and solemn asseverations of the katydids, the gentler message of the crickets, and in the distance an occasional roll-call of the grouse. My dog — who is a much better sportsman than myself, but whose companionship, I am ashamed to see, has not till now been mentioned — was all the while making forays hither and thither into the surrounding woods; and once in a while I heard, what is the best of all music in his ears, the whir of "partridge" wings. Likely as not he thought it a queer freak on my part to spend the afternoon thus idly, when with a gun I might have been so much more profitably employed. He could not know that I was satiating myself with a miser's delights, feasting my eyes upon my own. In truth, I fancy he takes it for granted that the whole forest belongs to me — and to him. Perhaps it does. As I said just now, I sometimes think so myself.

A WOODLAND INTIMATE.

Surely there are times
When they consent to own me of their kin,
And condescend to me, and call me cousin.
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

IT is one of the enjoyable features of bird study, as in truth it is of life in general, that so many of its pleasantest experiences have not to be sought after, but befall us by the way; like rare and beautiful flowers, which are never more welcome than when they smile upon us unexpectedly from the roadside.

One May morning I had spent an hour in a small wood where I am accustomed to saunter, and, coming out into the road on my way home again, fell in with a friend. "Would n't you like to see an oven-bird's nest?" I inquired. He assented, and turning back, I piloted him to the spot. The little mother sat motionless, just within the door of her comfortable, roofed house, watching us intently, but all uncon-

scious, it is to be feared, of our admiring comments upon her ingenuity and courage. Seeing her thus devoted to her charge, I wondered anew whether she could be so innocent as not to know that one of the eggs on which she brooded with such assiduity was not her own, but had been foisted upon her by a faithless cow-bird. To me, I must confess, it is inexplicable that any bird should be either so unobservant as not to recognize a foreign egg at sight, or so easy-tempered as not to insist on straightway being rid of it; though this is no more inscrutable, it may be, than for another bird persistently, and as it were on principle, to cast her own offspring upon the protection of strangers; while this, in turn, is not more mysterious than ten thousand every-day occurrences all about us. After all, it is a wise man that knows what to wonder at; while the wiser he grows the stronger is likely to become his conviction that, little as may be known, nothing is absolutely unknowable; that in the world, as in its Author, there is probably "no darkness at all," save as daylight is dark to owls and bats. I did not see the oven-bird's eggs at

this time, however, my tender-hearted companion protesting that their faithful custodian should not be disturbed for the gratification of his curiosity. So we bade her adieu, and went in pursuit of a solitary vireo, just then overheard singing not far off. A few paces brought him into sight, and as we came nearer and nearer he stood quite still on a dead bough, in full view, singing all the while. When my friend had looked him over to his satisfaction, — never having met with such a specimen before, — I set myself to examine the lower branches of the adjacent trees, feeling no doubt, from the bird's significant behavior, that his nest must be somewhere in the immediate neighborhood. Sure enough, it was soon discovered, hanging from near the end of an oak limb; a typical vireo cup, suspended within the angle of two horizontal twigs, with bits of newspaper wrought into its structure, and trimmed outwardly with some kind of white silky substance. The female was in it (this, too, we might have foreseen with reasonable certainty); but when she flew off, it appeared that as yet no eggs were laid. The couple manifested

scarce any uneasiness at our investigations, and we soon came away; stopping, as we left the wood, to spy out the nest of a scarlet tanager, the feminine builder of which was just then busy with giving it some finishing touches.

It had been a pleasant stroll, I thought, — nothing more; but it proved to be the beginning of an adventure which, to me at least, was in the highest degree novel and interesting.

I ought, perhaps, to premise that the solitary vireo (called also the blue-headed vireo and the blue-headed greenlet) is strictly a bird of the woods. It belongs to a distinctively American family, and is one of five species which are more or less abundant as summer residents in Eastern Massachusetts, being itself in most places the least numerous of the five, and, with the possible exception of the white-eye, the most retiring. My own hunting-grounds happen to be one of its favorite resorts (there is none better in the State, I suspect), so that I am pretty certain of having two or three pairs under my eye every season, within a radius of half a mile. I have

found a number of nests, also, but till this year had never observed any marked peculiarity of the birds as to timidity or fearlessness. Nor do I now imagine that any such strong race peculiarity exists. What I am to describe I suppose to be nothing more than an accidental and unaccountable idiosyncrasy of the particular bird in question. Such freaks of temperament are more or less familiar to all field naturalists, and may be taken as extreme developments of that individuality which seems to be the birthright of every living creature, no matter how humble. At this very moment I recall a white-throated sparrow, overtaken some years ago in an unfrequented road, whose tameness was entirely unusual, and, indeed, little short of ridiculous.

Three or four days after the walk just now mentioned I was again in the same wood, and went past the vireos' nest, paying no attention to it beyond noting that one of the birds, presumed to be the female, was on duty. But the next morning, as I saw her again, it occurred to me to make an experiment. So, quitting the path sud-

denly, I walked as rapidly as possible straight up to the nest, a distance of perhaps three rods, giving her no chance to slip off, with the hope of escaping unperceived. The plan worked to a charm, or so I flattered myself. When I came to a standstill my eyes were within a foot or two of hers; in fact, I could get no nearer without running my head against the branch; yet she sat quietly, apparently without a thought of being driven from her post, turning her head this way and that, but making no sound, and showing not the least sign of anything like distress. A mosquito buzzed about my face, and I brushed it off. Still she sat undisturbed. Then I placed my hand against the bottom of the nest. At this she half rose to her feet, craning her neck to see what was going on, but the moment I let go she settled back upon her charge. Surprised and delighted, I had no heart to pursue the matter further, and turned away; declaring to myself that, notwithstanding I had half promised a scientific friend the privilege of "taking" the nest, such a thing should now never be done with my consent. Be-

fore I could betray a confidence like this, I must be a more zealous ornithologist or a more unfeeling man, — or both at once. Science ought to be encouraged, of course, but not to the outraging of honor and common decency.

On the following day, after repeating such amenities as I had previously indulged in, I put forth my hand as if to stroke the bird's plumage; seeing which, she raised her beak threateningly and emitted a very faint deprecatory note, which would have been inaudible at the distance of a few yards. At the same time she opened and shut her bill, not snappishly, but slowly, — a nervous action, simply, it seemed to me.

Twenty-four hours later I called again, and was so favorably received that, besides taking hold of the nest, as before, I brushed her tail feathers softly. Then I put my hand to her head, on which she pecked my finger in an extremely pretty, gentle way, — more like kissing than biting, — and made use of the low murmuring sounds just now spoken of. Her curiosity was plainly wide awake. She stretched her neck to the utmost to look under the nest, getting upon

her feet for the purpose, till I expected every moment to see her slip away; but presently she grew quiet again, and I withdrew, leaving her in possession.

By this time a daily interview had come to be counted upon as a matter of course, by me certainly, and, for aught I know, by the vireo as well. On my next visit I stroked the back of her head, allowed her to nibble the tip of my finger, and was greatly pleased with the matter-of-fact manner in which she captured an insect from the side of the nest, while leaning out to oversee my manœuvres. Finally, on my offering to lay my left hand upon her, she quit her seat, and perched upon a twig, fronting me; and when I put my finger to her bill she flew off. Even now she made no outcry, however, but fell immediately to singing in tones of absolute good-humor, and before I had gone four rods from the tree was back again upon the eggs. Of these, I should have said, there were four, — the regular complement, — all her own. Expert as cow-birds are at running a blockade, it would have puzzled the shrewdest of them to smuggle anything into a nest so sedulously guarded.

Walking homeward, I bethought myself how foolish I had been not to offer my little *protégée* something to eat. Accordingly, in the morning, before starting out, I filled a small box with leaves from the garden rose-bush, which, as usual, had plenty of plant-lice upon it. Armed in this manner, as perhaps no ornithologist ever went armed before, — I approached the nest, and to my delight saw it still unharmed (I never came in sight of it without dreading to find it pillaged); but just as I was putting my hand into my pocket for the box, off started the bird. Here was a disappointment indeed; but in the next breath I assured myself that the recreant must be the male, who for once had been spelling his companion. So I fell back a little, and in a minute or less one of the pair went on to brood. This was the mother, without question, and I again drew near. True enough, she welcomed me with all her customary politeness. No matter what her husband might say, she knew better than to distrust an inoffensive, kind-hearted gentleman like myself. Had I not proved myself such time and again? So I imagined her to be

reasoning. At all events, she sat quiet and unconcerned; apparently more unconcerned than her visitor, for, to tell the truth, I was so anxious for the success of this crowning experiment that I actually found myself trembling. However, I opened my store of dainties, wet the tip of my little finger, took up an insect, and held it to her mandibles. For a moment she seemed not to know what it was, but soon she picked it off and swallowed it. The second one she seized promptly, and the third she reached out to anticipate, exactly as a tame canary might have done. Before I could pass her the fourth she stepped out of the nest, and took a position upon the branch beside it; but she accepted the morsel, none the less. And an extremely pretty sight it was, — a wild wood bird perched upon a twig and feeding from a man's finger!

She would not stay for more, but flew to another bough; whereupon I resumed my ramble, and, as usual, she covered the eggs again before I could get out of sight. When I returned, in half an hour or thereabouts, I proffered her a mosquito, which I had saved for that purpose. She took it, but presently

let it drop. It was not to her taste, probably, for shortly afterward she caught one herself, as it came fluttering near, and discarded that also; but she ate the remainder of my rose-bush parasites, though I was compelled to coax her a little. Seemingly, she felt that our proceedings were more or less irregular, if not positively out of character. Not that she betrayed any symptoms of nervousness or apprehension, but she repeatedly turned away her head, as if determined to refuse all further overtures. In the end, nevertheless, as I have said, she ate the very last insect I had to give her.

During the meal she did something which as a display of nonchalance was really amazing. The eggs got misplaced, in the course of her twisting about, and after vainly endeavoring to rearrange them with her feet, as I had seen her do on several occasions, she ducked her head into the nest, clean out of sight under her feathers, and set matters to rights with her beak. I was as near to her as I could well be, without having her actually in my hand, yet she deliberately put herself entirely off guard, apparently without the slightest misgiving!

Fresh from this adventure, and all aglow with pleasurable excitement, I met a friend in the city, a naturalist of repute, and one of the founders of the American Ornithologists' Union. Of course I regaled him with an account of my wonderful vireo (he was the man to whom I had half promised the nest); and on his expressing a wish to see her, I invited him out for the purpose that very afternoon. I smile to remember how full of fears I was, as he promptly accepted the invitation. The bird, I declared to myself, would be like the ordinary baby, who, as everybody knows, is never so stupid as when its fond mother would make a show of it before company. Yesterday it was so bright and cunning! Never was baby like it. Yesterday it did such and such unheard-of things; but to-day, alas, it will do nothing at all. However, I put on a bold face, filled my pen-box with rose-leaves, exchanged my light-colored hat for the black one in which my pet had hitherto seen me, furnished my friend with a field-glass, and started with him for the wood. The nest was occupied (I believe I never found it otherwise), and, stationing my associate in

a favorable position, I marched up to it, when, lo, the bird at once took wing. This was nothing to be disconcerted about, the very promptness of the action making it certain that the sitter must have been the male. The pair were both in sight, and the female would doubtless soon fill the place which her less courageous lord had deserted. So it turned out, and within a minute everything was in readiness for a second essay. This proved successful. The first insect was instantly laid hold of, whereupon I heard a suppressed exclamation from behind the field-glass. When I rejoined my friend, having exhausted my supplies, nothing would do but he must try something of the kind himself. Accordingly, seizing my hat, which dropped down well over his ears, he made up to the tree. The bird pecked his finger familiarly, and before long he came rushing back to the path, exclaiming that he must find something with which to feed her. After overturning two or three stones he uncovered an ant's nest, and moistening his forefinger, thrust it into a mass of eggs. With these he hastened to the vireo. She helped herself to them ea-

gerly, and I could hear him counting, "One, two, three, four," and so on, as she ate mouthful after mouthful.

Now, then, he wished to examine the contents of the nest, especially as it was the first of its kind that he had ever seen out-of-doors. But the owner was set upon not giving him the opportunity. He stroked her head, brushed her wings, and, as my note-book puts it, "poked her generally;" and still she kept her place. Finally, as he stood on one side of her and I on the other, we pushed the branch down, down, till she was fairly under our noses. Then she stepped off; but even now, it was only to alight on the very next twig, and face us calmly! and we had barely started away before we saw her again on duty. Brave bird! My friend was exceedingly pleased, and I not less so; though the fact of her making no difference between us was something of a shock to my self-conceit, endeavor as I might to believe that she had welcomed him, if not in my stead, yet at least as my friend. What an odd pair we must have looked in her eyes! Possibly she had heard of the new movement for the pro-

tection of American song-birds, and took us for representatives of the Audubon Society.

Desiring to make some fresh experiment, I set out the next morning with a little water and a teaspoon, in addition to my ordinary outfit of rose-leaves. The mother bird was at home, and without hesitation dipped her bill into the water, — the very first solitary vireo, I dare be bound, that ever drank out of a silver spoon! Afterwards I gave her the insects, of which she swallowed twenty-four as fast as I could pick them up. Evidently she was hungry, and appreciated my attentions. There was nothing whatever of the coquettishness which she had sometimes displayed. On the contrary, she leaned forward to welcome the tidbits, one by one, quite as if it were the most natural thing in the world for birds to be waited upon in this fashion by their human admirers. Toward the end, however, a squirrel across the way set up a loud bark, and she grew nervous; so that when it came to the twenty-fifth louse, which was the last I could find, she was too much preoccupied to care for it.

At this point a mosquito stung my neck,

and, killing it, I held it before her. She snapped at it in a twinkling, but retained it between her mandibles. Whether she would finally have swallowed it I am not able to say (and so must leave undecided a very interesting and important question in economic ornithology), for just then I remembered a piece of banana with which I had been meaning to tempt her. Of this she tasted at once, and, as I thought, found it good; for she transfixed it with her bill, and, quitting her seat, carried it away and deposited it on a branch. But instead of eating it, as I expected to see her do, she fell to fly-catching, while her mate promptly appeared, and as soon as opportunity offered took his turn at brooding. My eyes, meanwhile, had not kept the two distinct, and, supposing that the mother had returned, I stepped up to offer her another drink, but had no sooner filled the spoon than the fellow took flight. At this the female came to the rescue again, and unhesitatingly entered the nest. It was a noble reproof, I thought; well deserved, and very handsomely administered. "Oh, you cowardly dear," I fancied her saying,

"he 'll not hurt you. See me, now! I 'm not afraid. He 's queer, I know; but he means well."

I should have mentioned that while the squirrel was barking she uttered some very pretty *sotto voce* notes of two kinds, — one like what I have often heard, and one entirely novel.

A man ought to have lived with such a creature, year in and out, and seen it under every variety of mood and condition, before imagining himself possessed of its entire vocabulary. For who doubts that birds, also, have their more sacred and intimate feelings, their esoteric doctrines and experiences, which are not proclaimed upon the tree-top, but spoken under breath, in all but inaudible twitters? Certainly this pet of mine on sundry occasions whispered into my ear things which I had never heard before, and as to the purport of which, in my ignorance of the vireonian tongue, I could only conjecture. For my own part, I am through with thinking that I have mastered all the notes of any bird, even the commonest.

I wondered, by the bye, whether my

speech was as unintelligible to the greenlet as hers was to me. I trust, at all events, that she divined a meaning in the tones, however she may have missed the words; for I never called without telling her how much I admired her spirit. She was all that a bird ought to be, I assured her, good, brave, and handsome; and should never suffer harm, if I could help it. Alas! although, as the apostle says, I loved "not in word, but in deed and in truth," yet when the pinch came I was somewhere else, and all my promises went for nothing.

Our intercourse was nearing its end. It was already the 10th of June, and on the 12th I was booked for a journey. During my last visit but one it gratified me not a little to perceive that the wife's example and reproof had begun to tell upon her mate. He happened to be in the nest as I came up, and sat so unconcernedly while I made ready to feed him that I took it for granted I was dealing with the female, till at the last moment he slipped away. I stepped aside for perhaps fifteen feet, and waited briefly, both birds in sight. Then the lady took her turn at sitting, and I

proceeded to try again. She behaved like herself, made free with a number of insects, and then, all at once, for no reason that I could guess at, she sprang out of the nest, and alighted on the ground within two yards of my feet, and almost before I could realize what had occurred was up in the tree. I had my eyes upon her, determined, if possible, to keep the pair distinct, and succeeded, as I believed, in so doing. Pretty soon the male (unless I was badly deceived) went to the nest with a large insect in his bill, and stood for some time beside it, eating and chattering. Finally he dropped upon the eggs, and, seeing him grown thus unsuspicious, I thought best to test him once more. This time he kept his seat, and with great condescension ate two of my plant-lice. But there he made an end. Again and again I put the third one to his mouth; but he settled back obstinately into the nest, and would have none of it. For once, as it seemed, he could be brave; but he was not to be coddled, or treated like a baby — or a female. There were good reasons, of course, for his being less hungry than his mate, and conse-

quently less appreciative of such favors as I had to bestow; but it was very amusing to see how tightly he shut his bill, as if his mind were made up, and no power on earth should shake it.

If any inquisitive person raises the question whether I am absolutely certain of this bird's being the male, I must answer in the negative. The couple were dressed alike, as far as I could make out, save that the female was much the more brightly washed with yellow on the sides of the body; and my present discrimination of them was based upon close attention to this point, as well as upon my careful and apparently successful effort not to confuse the two, after the one which I knew to be the female (the one, that is, which had done most of the sitting, and had all along been so very familiar) had joined the other among the branches. I had no downright proof, it must be acknowledged, nor could I have had any without killing and dissecting the bird; but my own strong conviction was and is that the male had grown fearless by observing my treatment of his spouse, but from some difference of taste,

or, more probably, for lack of appetite, found himself less taken than she had commonly been with my rather meagre bill of fare.

This persuasion, it cannot be denied, was considerably shaken the next morning, when I paid my friends a parting call. The father bird, forgetful of his own good example of the day before, and mindless of all the proprieties of such a farewell occasion, slipped incontinently from the eggs just as I was removing the cover from my pen-box. Well, he missed the last opportunity he was likely ever to have of breakfasting from a human finger. So ignorant are birds, no less than men, of the day of their visitation! Before I could get away, — while I was yet within two yards of the nest, — the other bird hastened to occupy the vacant place. *She* knew what was due to so considerate and well-tried a friend, if her partner did not. The little darling! As soon as she was well in position I stepped to her side, opened my treasures, and gave her, one by one, twenty-six insects (all I had), which she took with avidity, reaching forward again and again to antici-

pate my motions. Then I stole a last look at the four pretty eggs, having almost to force her from the nest for that purpose, bade her good-by, and came away, sorry enough to leave her; forecasting, as I could not help doing, the slight probability of finding her again on my return, and picturing to myself all the sweet, motherly ways she would be certain to develop as soon as the little ones were hatched.

Within an hour I was speeding toward the Green Mountains. There, in those ancient Vermont forests, I saw and heard other solitary vireos, but none that treated me as my Melrose pair had done. Noble and gentle spirits! though I were to live a hundred years, I should never see their like again.

The remainder of the story is, unhappily, soon told. I was absent a fortnight, and on getting back went at once to the sacred oak. Alas! there was nothing but a severed branch to show where the vireos' nest had hung. The cut looked recent; I was thankful for that. Perhaps the "collector," whoever he was, had been kind enough to wait till the owners of the house were done

with it, before he carried it away. Let us hope so, at all events, for the peace of his own soul, as well as for the sake of the birds.

AN OLD ROAD.

Methinks here one may, without much molestation, be thinking what he is, whence he came, what he has done, and to what the King has called him. — BUNYAN.

I FALL in with persons, now and then, who profess to care nothing for a path when walking in the woods. They do not choose to travel in other people's footsteps, — nay, nor even in their own, — but count it their mission to lay out a new road every time they go afield. They are welcome to their freak. My own genius for adventure is less highly developed; and, to be frank, I have never learned to look upon affectation and whim as synonymous with originality. In my eyes, it is nothing against a hill that other men have climbed it before me; and if their feet have worn a trail, so much the better. I not only reach the summit more easily, but have company on the way, — company none the less to my mind, perhaps, for being silent and invisible. It is

well enough to strike into the trackless forest once in a while; to wander you know not whither, and come out you know not where; to lie down in a strange place, and for an hour imagine yourself the explorer of a new continent: but if the mind be awake (as, alas, too often it is not), you may walk where you will, in never so well known a corner, and you will see new things, and think new thoughts, and return to your house a new man, which, I venture to believe, is after all the main consideration. Indeed, if your stirring abroad is to be more than mere muscular exercise, you will find a positive advantage in making use of some well-worn and familiar path. The feet will follow it mechanically, and so the mind — that is, the walker himself — will be left undistracted. That, to my thinking, is the real tour of discovery wherein one keeps to the beaten road, looks at the customary sights, but brings home a new idea.

There are inward moods, as well as outward conditions, in which an old, half-disused, bush-bordered road becomes the saunterer's paradise. I have several such in my

eye at this moment, but especially one, in which my feet, years ago, grew to feel at home. It is an almost ideal loitering place, or would be, if only it were somewhat longer. How many hundreds of times have I traveled it, spring and summer, autumn and winter! As I go over it now, the days of my youth come back to me, clothed all of them in that soft, benignant light which nothing but distance can bestow, whether upon hills or days. This gracious effect is heightened, no doubt, by the fact that for a good while past my visits to the place have been only occasional. Memory and imagination are true yokefellows, and between them are always preparing some new pleasure for us, as often as we allow them opportunity. The other day, for instance, as I came to the top of the hill just beyond the river, I turned suddenly to the right, looking for an old pear-tree. I had not thought of it for years, and the more I have since tried to recall its appearance and exact whereabouts, the less confident have I grown that it ever had any material existence; but somehow, just at that moment my mouth seemed to recollect

it; and in general I have come to put faith in such involuntary and, if I may say so, sensible joggings of the memory. I wonder whether the tree ever was there — or anywhere. At all events, the thought of it gave me for the moment a pleasure more real than any taste in the mouth, were it never so sweet. Thank fortune, imaginative delights are as far as possible from being imaginary.

The river just mentioned runs under the road, and, as will readily be inferred, is one of its foremost attractions. I speak of it as a "river" with some misgivings. It is a rather large brook, or a very small river; but a man who has never been able to leap across it has perhaps no right to deny it the more honorable appellation. Its source is a spacious and beautiful sheet of water, which heretofore has been known as a "pond," but which I should be glad to believe would hereafter be put upon the maps as Lake Wessagusset. This brook or river, call it whichever you please, goes meandering through the township in a northeasterly direction, turning the wheels of half a dozen mills, more or less, on its

way; a sluggish stream, too lazy to work, you would think; passing much of its time in flat, grassy meadows, where it idles along as if it realized that the end of its course was near, and felt in no haste to lose itself in the salt sea. Out of this stream I pulled goodly numbers of perch, pickerel, shiners, flatfish, and hornpouts, while I was still careless-hearted enough ("Heaven lies about us in our infancy") to enjoy this very amiable and semi-religious form of "sport;" and as the river intersects at least seven roads that came within my boyish beat, I must have crossed it thousands of times; in addition to which I have spent days in paddling and bathing in it. Altogether, it is one of my most familiar friends; and — what one cannot say of all familiar friends — I do not remember that it ever served me the slightest ill-turn. It passes under the road of which I am now discoursing, in a double channel (the bridge being supported midway by a stone wall), and then broadens out into an artificial shallow, through which travelers may drive if they will, to let their horses drink out of the stream. First and last, I have improved

many a shining hour on this bridge, leaning industriously over the railing. I can see the rocky bed at this moment, — yes, and the very shape and position of some of the stones, as I saw them thirty years ago; especially of one, on which we used to balance ourselves to dip up the water or to peer under the bridge. In those days, if we essayed to be uncommonly adventurous, we waded through this low and somewhat dark passage; a gruesome proceeding, as we were compelled to stoop a little, short as we were, to save our heads, while the road, to our imagination, seemed in momentary danger of caving in upon us. Courage, like all other human virtues, is but a relative attribute. Possibly the heroic deeds upon which in our grown-up estate we plume ourselves are not greatly more meritorious or wonderful than were some of the childish ventures at the recollection of which we now condescend to feel amused.

On the surface of the brook flourished two kinds of insects, whose manner of life we never tired of watching. One sort had long, wide-spreading legs, and by us were

known as "skaters," from their movements (to this day, I blush to confess, I have no other name for them); the others were flat, shining, orbicular or oblong, lead-colored bugs, — "lucky bugs" I have heard them called, — and lay flat upon the water, as if quite without limbs; but they darted over the brook, and even against the current, with noticeable activity, and doubtless were well supplied with paddles. Once in a while we saw a fish here, but only on rare occasions. The great unfailing attraction of the place, then as now, was the flowing water, forever spending and never spent. The insects lived upon it; apparently they had no power to leave it for an instant; but they were not carried away by it. Happy creatures! We, alas, sporting upon the river of time, can neither dive below the surface nor mount into the ether, and, unlike the insects ("lucky bugs," indeed!), we have no option but to move with the tide. We have less liberty than the green flags, even, which grow in scattered tufts in the bed of the brook; whose leaves point forever down stream, like so many index fingers, as if they said, "Yes,

yes, that is the way to the sea; that way we all must go;" while for themselves, nevertheless, they manage to hold on by their roots, victorious even while professing to yield.

To my mind the river is alive. Reason about it as I will, I never can make it otherwise. I could sooner believe in water nymphs than in many existences which are commonly treated as much more certain matters of fact. I *could* believe in them, I say; but in reality I do not. My communings are not with any haunter of the river, but with the living soul of the river itself. It lags under the vine-covered alders, hastens through the bridge, then slips carelessly down a little descent, where it breaks into singing, then into a mill-pond and out again, and so on and on, through one experience after another; and all the time it is not dead water, but a river, a thing of life and motion. After all, it is not for me to say what is alive and what dead. As yet, indeed, I do not so much as know what life is. In certain moods, in what I fondly call my better moments, I feel measurably sure of being alive myself; but even on that

point, for aught I can tell, the brook may entertain some private doubts.

Just beyond the bridge is an ancient apple orchard. This was already falling into decay when I was a boy, and the many years that have elapsed since then have nearly completed its demolition; although I dare say the present generation of schoolboys still find it worth while to clamber over the wall, as they journey back and forth. Probably it will be no surprise to the owner of the place if I tell him that before I was twelve years old I knew the taste of all his apples. In fact, the orchard was so sequestered, so remote from any house, — especially from its proprietor's, — that it hardly seemed a sin to rob it. It was not so much an orchard as a bit of woodland; and besides, we never shook the trees, but only helped ourselves to windfalls; and it must be a severe moralist who calls *that* stealing. Why should the fruit drop off, if not to be picked up? In my time, at all events, such appropriations were never accounted robbery, though the providential absence of the owner was unquestionably a thing to be thankful for. He would never

begrudge us the apples, of course, for he was rich and presumably generous; but it was quite as well for him to be somewhere else while we were gathering up these favors which the winds of heaven had shaken down for our benefit. There is something of the special pleader in most of us, it is to be feared, whether young or old. If we are put to it, we can draw a very fine distinction (in our own favor), no matter how obtuse we may seem on ordinary occasions.

Remembering how voracious and undiscriminating my juvenile appetite was, I cannot help wondering that I am still alive, — a feeling which I doubt not is shared by many a man who, like myself, had a country bringing-up. We must have been born with something more than a spark of life, else it would certainly have been smothered long ago by the fuel so recklessly heaped upon it. But we lived out-of-doors, took abundant exercise, were not studious overmuch (as all boys and girls are charged with being nowadays), and had little to worry about, which may go far to explain the mystery.

It provokes a smile to reckon up the

many places along this old road that are indissolubly connected in my mind with the question of something to eat. At the foot of the orchard just now spoken of, for example, is a dilapidated stone wall, between it and the river. Over this, as well as over the bushes beside it, straggled a small wild grape-vine, bearing every year a scanty crop of white grapes. These, to our unsophisticated palates, were delicious, if only they got ripe. That was the rub; and as a rule we gathered our share of them (which was all there were) while they were yet several stages short of that desirable consummation, not deeming it prudent to leave them longer, lest some hungrier soul should get the start of us. Graping, as we called it, was one of our regular autumn industries, and there were few vines within the circle of our perambulations which did not feel our fingers tugging at them at least once a year. Some of them hung well over the river; others took refuge in the tops of trees; but by hook or by crook, we usually got the better of such perversities. No doubt the fruit was all bad enough; but some of it was

sweeter (or less sour) than other. Perhaps the best vine was one that covered a certain superannuated apple-tree, half a mile west of our river-side orchard, before mentioned. Here I might have been seen by the hour, eagerly yet cautiously venturing out upon the decayed and doubtful limbs, in quest of this or that peculiarly tempting bunch. These grapes were purple (how well some things are remembered!), and were sweeter then than Isabellas or Catawbas are now. Such is the degeneracy of vines in these modern days!

Altogether more important than the grapes were the huckleberries, for which, also, we four times out of five took this same famous by-road. Speaking roughly, I may say that we depended upon seven pastures for our supplies, and were accustomed to visit them in something like regular order. It is kindly provided that huckleberry bushes have an exceptionally strong tendency to vary. We possessed no theories upon the subject, and knew nothing of disputed questions about species and varieties; but we were not without a good degree of practical information. Here was

a bunch of bushes, for instance, covered with black, shiny, pear-shaped berries, very numerous, but very small. They would do moderately well in default of better. Another patch, perhaps but a few rods removed, bore large globular berries, less glossy than the others, but still black. These, as we expressed it, "filled up" much faster than the others, though not nearly so "thick." Blue berries (not blueberries, but blue huckleberries) were common enough, and we knew one small cluster of plants, the fruit of which was white, a variety that I have since found noted by Doctor Gray as very rare. Unhappily, this freak made so little impression upon me as a boy that while I am clear as to the fact, and feel sure of the pasture, I have no distinct recollection of the exact spot where the eccentric bushes grew. I should like to know whether they still persist. Gray's Manual, by the way, makes no mention of the blue varieties, but lays it down succinctly that the fruit of *Gaylussacia resinosa* is black.

The difference we cared most about, however, related not to color, shape, or size,

but to the time of ripening. Diversity of habit in this regard was indeed a great piece of good fortune, not to be rightly appreciated without horrible imaginings of how short the season of berry pies and puddings would be if all the berries matured at once. You may be sure we never forgot where the early sorts were to be found, and where the late. What hours upon hours we spent in the broiling sun, picking into some half-pint vessel, and emptying that into a larger receptacle, safely stowed away under some cedar-tree or barberry bush. How proud we were of our heaped-up pails! How carefully we discarded from the top every half-ripe or otherwise imperfect specimen! (So early do well-taught Yankee children develop one qualification for the diaconate.) The sun had certain minor errands to look after, we might have admitted, even in those midsummer days, but his principal business was to ripen huckleberries. So it seemed then. And now — well, men are but children still, and for them, too, their own little round is the centre of the world.

All these pastures had names, of course, well understood by us children, though I

am not sure how generally they would have been recognized by the townspeople. The first in order was River Pasture, the owner of which turned his cattle into it, and every few years mowed the bushes, with the result that the berries, whenever there were any, were uncommonly large and handsome. Not far beyond this (the entrance was through a "pair of bars," beside a spreading white oak) was Millstone Pasture. This was a large, straggling place, half pasture, half wood, full of nooks and corners, with by-paths running hither and thither, and named after two large bowlders, which lay one on top of the other. We used to clamber upon these to eat our luncheon, thinking within ourselves, meanwhile, that the Indians must have been men of prodigious strength. At that time, though I scarcely know how to own it, glacial action was a thing by us unheard of. We are wiser now, — on that point, at any rate. Two of the other pastures were called respectively after the railroad and a big pine-tree (there *was* a big pine-tree in W—— once, for I myself have seen the stump), while the remainder took

their names from their owners, real or reputed; and as some of these appellations were rather disrespectfully abbreviated, it may be as well to omit setting them down in print.

To all these places we resorted a little later in the season for blackberries, and later still for barberries. In one or two of them we set snares, also, but without materially lessening the quantity of game. The rabbits, especially, always helped themselves to the bait, and left us the noose. At this distance of time I do not begrudge them their good fortune. I hope they are all alive yet, including the youngster that we once caught in our hands and brought home, and then, in a fit of contrition, carried back again to its native heath.

All in all, the berries that we prized most, perhaps, were those that came first, and were at the same time least abundant. Yankee children will understand at once that I mean the checkerberries, or, as we were more accustomed to call them, the boxberries. The very first mild days in March, if the snow happened to be mostly

gone, saw us on this same old road bound for one of the places where we thought ourselves most likely to find a few (possibly a pint or two, but more probably a handful or two) of these humble but spicy fruits. Not that the plants were not plentiful enough in all directions, but it was only in certain spots (or rather in very *un*certain spots, since these were continually shifting) that they were ever in good bearing condition. We came after a while to understand that the best crops were produced for two or three years after the cutting off of the wood in suitable localities. Letting in the sunlight seems to have the effect of starting into sudden fruitfulness this hardy, persistent little plant, although I never could discover that it thrived better for growing permanently in an open, sunny field. Perhaps it requires an unexpected change of condition, a providential nudge, as it were, to jog it into activity, like some poets. Whatever the explanation, we used now and then in recent clearings (and nowhere else) to find the ground fairly red with berries. Those were red-letter days in our calendar. How handsome such a

patch of rose-color was (though we made haste to despoil it), circling an old stump or a bowlder! The berries were pleasant to the eye and good for food; but after all, their principal attractiveness lay in the fact that they came right upon the heels of winter. They were the first-fruits of the new year (ripened the year before, to be sure), and to our thinking were fit to be offered upon any altar, no matter how sacred.

I have called the subject of my loving meditations a by-road. Formerly it was the main thoroughfare between two villages, but shortly after my acquaintance with it began a new and more direct one was laid out. Yet the old road, half deserted as it is, has not altogether escaped the ruthless hand of the improver. Within my time it has been widened throughout, and in one place a new section has been built to cut off a curve. Fortunately, however, the discarded portion still remains, well grown up to grass, and closely encroached upon by willows, alders, sumachs, barberries, dogwoods, smilax, clethra, azalea, button-bush, birches, and what not, yet still passable even for carriages,

and more inviting than ever to lazy pedestrians like myself. On this cast-off section is a cosy, grassy nook, shaded by a cluster of red cedars. This was one of our favorite way-stations on summer noons. It gives me a comfortable, restful feeling to look into it even now, as if my weary limbs had reminiscences of their own connected with the place.

Right at this point stands an ancient russet-apple tree, which seems no older and brings forth no smaller apples now than it did when I first knew it. How natural it looks in every knot and branch! Strange, too, that it should be so, since I do not recall its ever contributing the first mouthful to my pleasures as a schoolboy gastronomer. In those times I judged a tree solely by the New Testament standard, very literally interpreted, — "By their fruits ye shall know them." Now I have other tests, and can value an old acquaintance of this kind for its picturesqueness, though its apples be bitter as wormwood.

I am making too much of the food question, and will therefore say nothing of strawberries, raspberries, thimbleberries, cranber-

ries (which last were delicious, as we took them out of their icy ovens in the spring), pig-nuts, hazel-nuts, acorns, and the rest. Yet I will not pass by a small clump of dangleberry bushes (a September luxury not common in our neighborhood) and a lofty pear-tree. The latter, in truth, hardly belongs under this head; for though it bore superabundant crops of pears, not even a child was ever known to eat one. We called them iron pears, perhaps because nothing but the hottest fire could be expected to reduce them to a condition of softness. My mouth is all in a pucker at the mere thought of the rusty-green bullets. It did seem a pity they should be so outrageously hard, so absolutely untoothsome; for the tree, as I say, was a big one and provokingly prolific, and, moreover, stood squarely upon the roadside. What a godsend we should have found it, had its fruit been a few degrees less stony! Such incongruities and disappointments go far to convince me that the creation is indeed, as some theologians have taught, under a curse.

My appetite for wild fruits has grown dull with age, but meanwhile my affection

for the old road has not lessened, but rather increased. In itself the place is nowise remarkable, a common country back road (its very name is Back Street); but all the same I "take pleasure in its stones, and favor the dust thereof." There are none of us so matter-of-fact and unsentimental, I hope, as never to have experienced the force of old associations in gilding the most ordinary objects. For my own part, I protest, I would give more for a single stunted cluster of orange-red berries from a certain small vine of Roxbury wax-work, near the entrance to Millstone Pasture aforesaid, than for a bushel of larger and handsomer specimens from some alien source. This old vine still holds on, I am happy to see, though it appears to have made no growth in twenty years. Long may it be spared! It was within a few rods of it, beside the path that runs into the pasture, that I shot my first bird. Newly armed with a shot-gun, and on murder bent, I turned in here; and as luck would have it, there sat the innocent creature in a birch. The temptation was too great. There followed a moment of excitement, a nervous aim, a bang, and

a catbird's song was hushed forever. A mean and cruel act, which I confess with shame, and have done my best to atone for by speaking here and there a good word for this poorly appreciated member of our native choir. I should be glad to believe that the schoolboys of the present day are more tender-hearted than those with whom I mixed; but I am not without my doubts. As Darwin showed, all animals in the embryonic stage tend to reproduce ancestral characteristics; and our Anglo-Saxon ancestors (how easy it seems to believe it!) were barbarians.

This same Millstone Pasture, by the bye, was a place of special resort at Christmas time. Here grew plenty of the trailing plant which we knew simply as "evergreen," but which now, in my superior wisdom, I call *Lycopodium complanatum.* This, indeed, was common in various directions, but the holly was much less easily found, and grew here more freely than anywhere else. The unhappy trees had a hard shift to live, so broken down were they with each recurring December; and the more berries they produced, the worse for them.

Their anticipations of Christmas must have been strangely different from those of us toy-loving, candy-eating children. But who thinks of sympathizing with a tree?

As for the wayside flowers, they are, as becomes the place, of the very commonest and most old-fashioned sorts, more welcome to my eye than the choicest of rarities: golden-rods and asters in great variety and profusion, hardhack and meadow-sweet, St. John's wort and loosestrife, violets and anemones, self-heal and cranesbill, and especially the lovely but little-known purple gerardia. These, with their natural companions and allies, make to me a garden of delights, whereunto my feet, as far as they find opportunity, do continually resort. What flowers ought a New Englander to love, if not such as are characteristic of New England?

And yet, proudly and affectionately as I talk of it, Back Street is not what it once was. I have already mentioned the straightening, as also the widening, both of them sorry improvements. Furthermore, there was formerly a huge (as I remember it) and beautifully proportioned hemlock-tree,

at which I used to gaze admiringly in the first years of my wandering hither. What millions of tiny cones hung from its pendulous branches! The magnificent creation should have been protected by legislative enactment, if necessary; but no, almost as long ago as I can remember, long before I attained to grammar-school dignities, the owner of the land (so he thought himself, no doubt) turned the tree into firewood. And worse yet, the stately pine grove that flourished across the way, with mossy bowlders underneath and a most delightsome density of shade, — this, too, like the patriarchal hemlock, has been cut off in the midst of its usefulness.

> "Their very memory is fair and bright,
> And my sad thoughts doth cheer!"

Now there is nothing on the whole hillside but a thicket of young hard-wood trees (I would say deciduous, but in New England, alas, all trees are deciduous), through which my dog loves to prowl, but which warns me to keep the road. Such devastations are not to be prevented, I suppose, but at least there is no law against my bewailing them.

Even in its present decadence, however,

my road, as I said to begin with, is a kind of saunterer's paradise. When we come to particulars, indeed, it is nothing to boast of; but waiving particulars, and taking it for all in all, there is no highway upon the planet where I better enjoy an idle hour. There is a boy of perhaps ten years whose companionship is out of all reason dear to me; and nowhere am I surer to find him at my side, hand in hand, than in this same lonely road, although I know very well that those who meet or pass me here see only one person, and that a man of several times ten years. But thank Heaven, we are not always alone when we seem to be.

CONFESSIONS OF A BIRD'S-NEST HUNTER.

I am bold to show myself a forward guest.
SHAKESPEARE.

LET it be said at the outset that the seeker after bird's-nests is never without plenty of company, of one sort and another. For instance, I was out early one cloudy morning last spring, when I caught sight of a handsome black and white animal nosing his way through the bushes on one side of the path. He had come forth on the same errand as myself; and I thought at once of the veery's nest, for which I had been looking in vain, but which could not be far from the very spot where my black and white rival was just at this moment standing. I wondered whether he had already found it; but I did not stay to ask him. In spite of his beauty, and in spite of our evident community of interest, I felt no drawings toward a more intimate

acquaintance. I knew him by name and reputation, — *Mephitis mephitica* the scientific folk call him, with felicitous reverberative emphasis, — and that sufficed. At another time, a few weeks later than this, I overheard an unusual commotion among the birds in our apple orchard. "Some rascally cat!" I thought; and, picking up a stone, I hastened to put a stop to his depredations. But there was no cat in sight; and it was not till I stood immediately under the tree that I discovered the marauder to be a snake, just then slowly making toward the ground, with a young bird in his jaws. Watching my opportunity, while he was engaged in the delicate operation of lowering himself from one branch to another, I shook the trunk vigorously, and down he tumbled at my feet. Once and again I set my heel upon him; but the tall grass was in his favor, and he succeeded in getting off, leaving his dead victim behind him.[1]

[1] The birds at once became quiet, and I went back complacently to my book under the linden-tree. Who knows, however, whether there may not have been another side to the story? Who shall say what were the emotions of the snake, as he wriggled painfully homeward after such an

It is noble society in which we find ourselves, is it not? In the front rank are what we may call the *professional* oölogists, — such as follow the business for a livelihood: snakes, skunks, weasels, squirrels, cats, crows, jays, cuckoos, and the like. Then come the not inconsiderable number of persons who, for a more or less strictly scientific purpose, take here and there a nest with its contents; while these are followed by hordes of school-boys, whom the prevalent mania for "collecting" drives to scrape together miscellaneous lots of eggs, — half-named, misnamed, and nameless, — to put with previous accumulations of postage-stamps, autographs, business cards, and other like precious rubbish.

Alas, the poor birds! These "perils of robbers" and "perils among false brethren" are bad enough, but they have many others to encounter; "journeyings often" and "perils of waters" being among the worst. Gentle and innocent as they seem, it speaks

assault? Myself no vegetarian, by what right had I belabored him for liking the taste of chicken? It were well, perhaps, not to pry too curiously into questions of this kind. Most likely it would not flatter our human self-esteem to know what some of our "poor relations" think of us.

well for their cunning and endurance that they escape utter extermination.

This phase of the subject is especially forced upon the attention of observers like myself, who search for nests, not mischievously, nor even with the laudable design of the scientific investigator, but solely as a means of promoting friendly acquaintance. We may not often witness the catastrophe itself; but as we go our daily rounds, now peeping under the bank or into the bush, and now climbing the tree, to see how some timid friend of ours is faring, we are only too certain to come upon first one home and then another which has been rifled and deserted since our last visit; till we begin to wonder why the defenseless and persecuted creatures do not turn pessimists outright, and relinquish forever their attempt to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."

Thinking of these things anew, now that I am reviewing my last spring's experiences, it is doubly gratifying to recall that I robbed only one nest during the entire season, and that not of malice, but by accident. It happened on this wise. A couple

of solitary vireos had taken up their abode on a wooded hillside, where they, or others like them, had passed the previous summer, and one day I proposed to a friend that we make it our business to search out the nest. It proved to be not very difficult of discovery, though, when we put our eyes upon it, it appeared that we had walked directly by it several times, all in sight as it was, suspended from near the end of an oak-tree branch, perhaps nine feet from the ground. It contained five eggs, including one of the cow-bird; but just as my companion was about to let go the branch, which he had been holding down for my convenience, the end snapped, up went the nest, and out jumped four of the eggs. We were sorry, of course, but consoled ourselves with the destruction of the parasite, which otherwise would very likely have been the death of the vireos' own offspring. Meanwhile, the birds themselves took matters coolly. One of them fell to singing as soon as we withdrew, while the other flew to the nest, looked in, and without a word resumed her seat. After all, the accident might turn out to be nothing worse

than a blessing in disguise, we said to each other. But before many days it became evident that the pair had given up the nest, and I carried it to a friend whom I knew to be in want of such a specimen for his cabinet.

It is worth noticing how widely birds of the same species differ among themselves in their behavior under trial. Their minds are no more run in one mould than human minds are. In their case, as in ours, innumerable causes have worked together to produce the unique individual result. Much is due to inheritance, no doubt, but much likewise to accident. One mother has never had her nest invaded, and is therefore careless of our presence. Another has so frequently been robbed of her all that she has grown hardened to disaster, and she also makes no very great ado when we intrude upon her. A third is still in a middle state, — alive to the danger, but not yet able to face it philosophically, — and she will become hysterical at the first symptom of trouble.

At the very time of the mishap just described I was keeping watch over the

household arrangements of another and much less stoical pair of solitary vireos. These, as soon as I discovered their secret (which was not till after several attempts), became extremely jealous of my proximity, no matter how indirect and innocent my approaches. Even when I seated myself at what I deemed a very respectful distance the sitting bird would at once quit her place, and begin to complain in her own delightfully characteristic manner, — chattering, scolding, and warbling by turns, — refusing to be pacified in the least until I took myself off. Once I remained for some time close under the nest, on purpose to see how many of the neighbors would be attracted to the spot. With the exception of the wood wagtails, I should say that nearly all the small birds in the immediate vicinity must have turned out: black-and-white creepers, redstarts, chestnut-sided warblers, black-throated greens, a blue golden-wing, red-eyed vireos, and a third solitary vireo. If they were moved with pity for the pair whose lamentations had drawn them together, they did not manifest it, as far as I could see. Perhaps they

found small occasion for so loud a disturbance. Possibly, moreover, as spectators who had honored me with their presence (and that in the very midst of their busy season), they felt themselves cheated, and, so to speak, outraged, by my failure to finish the tragedy artistically, by shooting the parent birds and pulling down the nest. Creatures who can neither read novels nor attend upon dramatic performances may be presumed to suffer at times for lack of a pleasurable excitement of the sensibilities. At all events, these visitors contented themselves with staring at me for a few minutes, and then one by one turned away, as if it were not much of a show after all. To the interested couple, however, it was a matter of life and death. The female especially (or the sitter, for the sexes are indistinguishable) hopped close about my head, sometimes uttering a strangely sweet, pleading note, which might have melted a heart much harder than mine. Her associate kept at a more cautious remove, but made amends by continuing to scold after the danger was all over. By the bye, I noticed that in the midst of the commotion, as soon

as the first agony was past, the one who had been sitting was not so entirely overcome as not to be able to relish an occasional insect, which she snatched here and there between her vituperative exclamations. Faithful and hungry little mother! her heart was not broken, let us hope, when within a week or so some miscreant, to me unknown, ravaged her house and left it desolate.

Not many rods from the vireos' cedar-tree was a brown thrasher's nest in a barberry bush. It had an exceedingly dilapidated, year-old appearance, and I went by it several times without thinking it worth looking at, till I accidentally observed the bird upon it. She did not budge till I was within a few feet of her, when she tumbled to the ground, and limped away with loud cries. Perceiving that this worn-out ruse did not avail, she turned upon me, and actually seemed about to make an attack. How she did rave! I thought that I had never seen a bird so beside herself with anger.

Shortly after my encounter with this irate thrush I nearly stepped upon one of her

sisters, brooding upon a ground nest; and it illustrates what has been said about variety of temperament that the second bird received me in a very quiet, self-contained manner; giving me to understand, to be sure, that my visit was ill-timed and unwelcome, but not acting at all as if I were some ogre, the very sight of which must perforce drive a body crazy.

In the course of the season I found three nests of the rose-breasted grosbeak. The first, to my surprise, was in the topmost branches of a tall sweet-birch, perhaps forty feet above the ground. I noticed the female flying into the grove with a load of building materials, and a little later (as soon as my engagement with an interesting company of gray-cheeked thrushes would permit) I followed, and almost at once saw the pair at their work. And a very pretty exhibition it was, — so pretty that I returned the next morning to see more of it. It must be admitted that the labor seemed rather unequally divided: the female not only fetched all the sticks, but took upon herself the entire business of construction, her partner's contribution to the enterprise being limited

strictly to the performance of escort duty. When she had fitted the new twigs into their place to her satisfaction (which often took considerable time) she uttered a signal, and the pair flew out of the wood together, talking sweetly as they went. The male was aware of my presence from the beginning, I think, but he appeared to regard it as of no consequence. Probably he believed the nest well out of my reach, as in fact it was. He usually sang a few snatches while waiting for his wife, and, as he sat within a few feet of her and made no attempt at concealment, it could hardly be supposed that he refrained from offering to assist her for fear his brighter colors should betray their secret. Some different motive from this must be assigned for his seeming want of gallantry. To all appearance, however, the parties themselves took the whole proceeding as a simple matter of course. They were but minding the most approved grosbeak precedents; and after all, who is so likely to be in the right as he who follows the fashion? Shall one bird presume to be wiser than all the millions of his race? Nay; as the Preacher long

ago said, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be." Nothing could have been more complacent and affectionate than the lady's voice and demeanor as often as she gave the finishing touches to a twig, and called to her companion, "Come, now, let's go for another." Naturally, the female is the one most concerned about the stability and comfortable shape of the nest, and possibly she does not count it prudent to entrust her spouse with any share in so delicate and important an undertaking; but, if so, she must know him for an arrant bungler, since the structure which she herself puts together is a most shabby-looking affair, scarcely better than the cuckoo's.

Such happiness as that of these married lovers was perhaps too perfect to last. At any rate, it was only a week before their idyl all at once turned to tragedy. A sharp *click, click!* attracted my attention, as I passed under their birch (on my way to call upon a pair of chickadees, who were keeping house in a low stump close by), and, glancing up, I saw the bushy tail of a red squirrel hanging over the edge of the nest. The male grosbeak was dashing wildly

about the invader while a wood thrush, a towhee bunting (who looked strange at such a height), a red-eyed vireo, and a blue golden-winged warbler were surveying the scene from the adjacent branches, — though the thrush withdrew in the midst of the tumult, and fell to singing (as one may see happy young couples going merrily homeward after witnessing the murder of Duncan or Desdemona). Meanwhile, the squirrel, having finished his work, descended leisurely toward the ground, snickering and chuckling, as if he felt immensely pleased with his achievement. Probably his emotions did not differ essentially from those of a human sportsman, but it was lucky for him, nevertheless, that I had no means of putting an end to his mirth. I could have blown his head off without compunction. When he had gone, and the visiting birds with him, the grosbeak returned to his nest, and in the most piteous manner hovered about the spot, — getting into the nest and out again, — as if completely dazed by the sudden disaster. Throughout the excitement the female did not show herself, and I wondered whether she could have sub-

mitted to be killed rather than desert her charge. To the honor of her kind be it said that the supposition is far from incredible.

My second nest of this species was within twenty rods of the first, and was in use at the same time; but it met with no better fate, though I was not present to see it robbed. The third was more prosperous, and, unless something befell the young at the last moment, they were safely launched upon the wing. This nest was situated in a clump of witch-hazel bushes, at a height of eight or nine feet. I remarked a grosbeak singing near the spot, and, seeing him very unwilling to move away, concluded that his home could not be far off. It was soon found, — a slight, shapeless, frail-looking bundle of sticks, with the female upon it. I took hold of the main stem, just below her, and drew her towards me; but she would not rise, although I could see her moving uneasily. I had no heart to annoy her; so I called her a good, brave bird, and left her in peace. Her mate, all this while, kept on singing; and to judge from his behavior, I might have been some honored guest, to be welcomed with music. The

simple-hearted — not to say simple-minded — fearlessness of this bird is really astonishing; especially in view of the fact that his showy plumage makes him a favorite mark for every amateur taxidermist. He will even warble while brooding upon the eggs, a delicious piece of absurdity, which I hope sooner or later to witness for myself.

While watching my first couple of grosbeaks I suddenly became aware of a wood thrush passing back and forth between the edge of a brook and a certain oak, against the bole of which she was making ready her summer residence. She seemed to be quite unattended; but just as I was beginning to contrast her case with that of the feminine grosbeak overhead, her mate broke into song from a low branch directly behind me. *She* had all the while known where he was, I dare say, and would have been greatly amused at my commiseration of her loneliness. The next morning she was compelled to make longer flights for such stuff as she needed; and now it was pleasant to observe that her lord did not fail to accompany her to and fro, and to sing to her while she worked.

The wood thrush has the name of a recluse, and, as compared with the omnipresent robin, he may deserve the title; but he is seldom very difficult of approach, if one only knows how to go about it, while his nest is peculiarly easy of detection. I remember one which was close by an unfenced road, just outside the city of Washington; and two or three years ago I found another in a barberry bush, not more than fifteen feet from a horse-car track, and so near the fence as to be almost within arm's-length of passers-by. This latter was in full view from the street, and withal was so feebly supported that some kind-hearted neighbor had taken pains to tie up the bush (which stood by itself) with a piece of dangerously new-looking rope. And even as I write I recall still a third, which also was close by the roadside, though at the very exceptional elevation of twenty-five or thirty feet.

It is one of the capital advantages of the ornithologist's condition that he is rarely called upon to spend his time and strength for naught. If he fails of the particular object of his search, he is all but sure to

be rewarded with something else. For example, while I was unsuccessfully playing the spy upon a pair of my solitary vireos, a female tanager suddenly dropped into her half-built nest in a low pine-branch, at the same time calling softly to her mate, who at once came to sit beside her. Unfortunately, one of the pair very soon caught sight of me, and they made off in haste. I lingered about, till finally the lady appeared again, with her beak full of sticks, standing out at all points of the compass. She was so jealous of my espionage, however, that it looked as if she would never be rid of her load. No sooner did she alight in the tree than she began to crane her neck, staring this way and that, and *chipping* nervously; then she shifted her perch; then out of the tree she went altogether; then back again; then off once more; then back within a yard of the nest; then away again, till at last my patience gave out, and I left her mistress of the field. All this while the male was in sight, flitting restlessly from tree to tree at a safe distance. I have never witnessed a prettier display of connubial felicity than this pair afforded me during

the minute or two which elapsed between my discovery of them and their discovery of me. I felt almost guilty for intruding upon such a scene; but, if they could only have believed it, I intended no harm, nor have I now any thought of profaning their innocent mysteries by attempting to describe what I saw.

The male tanager, with his glory of jet black and flaming scarlet, is in curious contrast with his mate, with whose personal appearance, nevertheless, he seems to be abundantly satisfied. Possibly he looks upon a dirty greenish-yellow as the loveliest of tints, and regards his own dress as nothing better than commonplace, in comparison. Like the rose-breasted grosbeak and the wood thrush, however, he is brought up with the notion that it belongs to the female to be the carpenter of the family; a belief in which, happily for his domestic peace, the female herself fully concurs.

As a general thing, handsomely dressed people live in handsome houses (emphasis should perhaps be laid on the word *dressed*), and it would seem natural that a like congruity should hold in the case of birds.

But, if such be the rule, there are at least some glaring exceptions. I have alluded to the rude structure of the rose-breast, and might have used nearly the same language concerning the tanager's, which latter is often fabricated so loosely that one can see the sky through it. Yet these two are among the most gorgeously attired of all our birds. On the other hand, while the wood pewee is one of the very plainest, there are few, if any, that excel her as an architect. During the season under review I had the good fortune to light upon my first nest of this fly-catcher; and, as is apt to be true, having found one, I immediately and without effort found two others. The first two were in oaks, the third in a hornbeam; and all were set upon the upper side of a horizontal bough ("saddled" upon it, as the manuals say), at the junction of an offshoot with the main branch. Two of them were but partially done when discovered, and I was glad to see one pair of the birds in something very like a frolic, such a state as would hardly be predicted of these peculiarly sober-seeming creatures. The builder of the second nest was remarkably confid-

ing, and proceeded with her labors, quite undisturbed by my proximity and undisguised interest. It was to be remarked that she had trimmed the outside of her nest with lichens before finishing the interior; and I especially admired the very clever manner in which she hovered against the dead pine-trunk, from which she was gathering strips of bark. Concerning her unsuspiciousness, however, it should be said that the word applies only to her treatment of myself. When a thrasher had the impertinence to alight in her oak she ordered him off in high dudgeon, dashing back and forth above him, and snapping spitefully as she passed. She knew her rights, and, knowing, dared maintain. When a bird builds her nest in any part of a tree she claims every twig of it as her own. I have even seen the gentle-hearted chickadee resent the intrusion of a chipping sparrow, though it appeared impossible that the latter could be suspected of any predatory or sinister design.

The shallowness of the wood pewee's saucer-shaped nest, its position upon the branch, and especially its external dress of lichens,

all conspire to render it inconspicuous. It is an interesting question whether the owner herself appreciates this, or has merely inherited the fashion, without thought of the reasons for it. The latter supposition, I reluctantly confess, looks to me the more probable. It must often be true of other animals, as it is of men, that they build better than they know. Their wisdom is not their own, but belongs to a power back of them, — a power which works, if you will, in accordance with what we designate as the law of natural selection, and which, so to speak, enlightens the race rather than the individual.

After all, it is the ground birds that puzzle the human oölogist. Crossing a brook, I saw what I regarded as almost infallible signs that a pair of Maryland yellow-throats had begun to build beside it. Unless I was entirely at fault, the nest must be within a certain two or three square yards, and I devoted half an hour, more or less, to ransacking the grass and bushes, till I thought every inch of the ground had been gone over; but all to no purpose. Continuing my walk, I noticed after a while that the

male warbler was accompanying me up the hillside, apparently determined to see me safely out of the way. Coming to the same brook again the next morning, I halted for another search; and lo! all in a moment my eye fell upon the coveted nest, not on the ground, but perhaps eight inches from it, in a little clump of young golden-rods, which would soon overgrow it completely. The female proprietor was present, and manifested so much concern that I would not tarry, but made rather as if I had seen nothing, and passed on. It was some time before I observed that she was keeping along beside me, precisely as her mate had done the day before. The innocent creatures, sorely pestered as they were, could hardly be blamed for such precautions; yet it is not pleasant to be "shadowed" as a suspicious character, even by Maryland yellow-throats.

This was my first nest of a very common warbler, and I felt particularly solicitous for its safety; but alas! no sooner was the first egg laid than something or somebody carried it off, and the afflicted couple deserted the house on which they had expended so much labor and anxiety.

Not far beyond the yellow-throats' brook, and almost directly under one of the pewees' oaks, was a nest which pretty certainly had belonged to a pair of chewinks, but which was already forsaken when I found it, though I had then no inkling of the fact. It contained four eggs, and everything was in perfect order. The mother had gone away, and had never come back; having fallen a victim, probably, to some collector, human or inhuman. The tragedy was peculiar; and the tragical effect of it was heightened as day after day, for nearly a fortnight at least (I cannot say for how much longer), the beautiful eggs lay there entirely uncovered, and yet no skunk, squirrel, or other devourer of such dainties happened to spy them. It seemed doubly sad that so many precious nests should be robbed, while this set of worthless eggs was left to spoil.

I have already mentioned the housekeeping of a couple of chickadees in a low birch stump. Theirs was one of three titmouse nests just then claiming my attention. I visited it frequently, from the time when the pair were hard at work making the

cavity up to the time when the brood were nearly ready to shift for themselves. Both birds took their share of the digging, and on several occasions I saw one feeding the other. After the eggs were deposited, the mother (or the sitter) displayed admirable courage, refusing again and again to quit her post when I peered in upon her, and even when with my cane I rapped smartly upon the stump. If I put my fingers into the hole, however, she followed them out in hot haste. Even when most seriously disturbed by my attentions the pair made use of no other notes than the common *chickadee, dee*, but these they sometimes delivered in an unnaturally sharp, fault-finding tone.

My two other titmouse nests were both in apple-trees, and one of them was in my own door-yard, though beyond convenient reach without the help of a ladder. The owners of this last were interesting for a very decided change in their behavior after the young were hatched, and especially as the time for the little ones' exodus drew near. At first, notwithstanding their door opened right upon the street, as it were,

within a rod or two of passing horse-cars, the father and mother went in and out without the least apparent concern as to who might be watching them; but when they came to be feeding their hungry offspring, it was almost laughable to witness the little craftinesses to which they resorted. They would perch on one of the outer branches, call *chickadee, dee*, fly a little nearer, then likely enough go further off, till finally, after a variety of such "false motions," into the hole they would duck, as if nobody for the world must be allowed to know where they had gone. It was really wonderful how expert they grew at entering quickly. I pondered a good deal over their continual calling on such occasions. It seemed foolish and inconsistent; half the time I should have failed to notice their approach, had they only kept still. Toward the end, however, when the chicks inside the trunk could be heard articulating *chickadee, dee* with perfect distinctness, it occurred to me that possibly all this persistent repetition of the phrase by the old birds had been only or mainly in the way of tuition. At all events, the youngsters had

this part of the chickadese vocabulary right at their tongues' end, as we say, before making their *début* in the great world.

But it was reserved for my third pair of tits to give me a genuine surprise. I had been so constant a visitor at their house that I had come to feel myself quite on terms of intimacy with them. So, after their brood was hatched, I one day climbed into the tree (as I had done more than once before), the better to overlook their parental labors. I had hardly placed myself in a comfortable seat before the couple returned from one of their foraging expeditions. The male — or the one that I took for such — had a black morsel of some kind in his bill, which, on reaching the tree, he passed over to his mate, who forthwith carried it into the hollow stub, in the depths of which the hungry little ones were. Then the male flew off again, and presently came back with another beakful, which his helpmeet took from him at the door, where she had been awaiting his arrival. After this performance had been repeated two or three times, curiosity led me to stand up against the stub, with my hand resting upon it; at

which the female (who was just inside the mouth of the cavity) slipped out, and set up an anxious *chickadee, dee, dee.* When her mate appeared, — which he did almost immediately, — he flew into what looked like a downright paroxysm of rage, not against me, but against the mother bird, shaking his wings and scolding violently. I came to the unhappy lady's relief as best I could by dropping to the ground, and within a few minutes the pair again approached the stub in company ; but when the female made a motion to take the food from her husband's bill, as before, he pounced upon her spitefully, drove her away, and dived into the hole himself. Apparently he had not yet forgiven what he accounted her pusillanimous desertion of her charge. All in all, the scene was a revelation to me, a chickadee family quarrel being something the like of which I had never dreamed of. Perhaps no titmouse ever before had so timorous a wife. But however that might be, I sincerely hoped that they would not be long in making up their difference. I had enjoyed the sight of their loving intercourse for so many weeks that I should have

been sorry indeed to believe that it could end in strife. Nor could I regard it as so unpardonable a weakness for a bird to move off, even from her young, when a man put his fingers within a few inches of her. Possibly she ought to have known that I meant no mischief. Possibly, too, her doughty lord would have behaved more commendably in the same circumstances; but of that I am by no means certain. To borrow a theological term, my conception of bird nature is decidedly anthropomorphic, and I incline to believe that chickadees as well as men find it easier to blame others than to do better themselves.

Here these reminiscences must come to an end, though the greater part of my season's experiences are still untouched. First, however, let me relieve my conscience by putting on record the bravery of a black-billed cuckoo, whom I was obliged fairly to drive from her post of duty. Her nest was a sorry enough spectacle, — a flat, unwalled platform, carpeted with willow catkins and littered with egg-shells, in the midst of which latter lay a single callow nestling, nearly as black as a crow. But as I looked

at the parent bird, while she sat within ten feet of me, eying my every movement intently, and uttering her wrath in various cries (some catlike mewings among them), my heart reproached me that I had ever written of the cuckoo as a coward and a sneak. Truth will not allow me to take the words back entirely, even now; but I felt at that moment, and do still, that I might have been better employed mending my own faults than in holding up to scorn the foibles of a creature who, when worst came to worst, could set me such a shining example of courageous fidelity. It is always in order to be charitable; and I ought to have remembered that, for those who are themselves subject to imperfection, generosity is the best kind of justice.

A GREEN MOUNTAIN CORN-FIELD.

Thus, without theft, I reap another's field. — SIDNEY LANIER.

I WAS passing some days of idleness in a shallow Vermont valley, situated at an elevation of fifteen or sixteen hundred feet, circled by wooded hills, and intersected by an old turnpike, which connects the towns near Lake Champlain with the region beyond the mountains. Small farmhouses stood here and there along the highway, while others were scattered at wide intervals over the lower slopes of the outlying hills.

With all the brightness and freshness of early summer upon it, it was indeed an enchanting picture; but even so, one could not altogether put aside a feeling of something like commiseration for the people who, year in and year out, from babyhood to old age, found in this narrow vale, with its severity of weather, and its

scarcity of social comforts and opportunities, their only experience of what we fondly call this wide, wide world.

From my inn I had walked eastward for perhaps a mile; then at the little schoolhouse had taken a cross-road, which presently began to climb. Here I passed two or three cottages (one of them boasting the singularity of paint), and after a while came to another, which appeared to be the last, as the road not far beyond struck into the ancient forest. First, however, it ran up to a small plateau, where, out of sight from the house, lay a scanty quarter of an acre, in which the old parable, "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," was in the primary stage of its fresh annual fulfillment. The ground was but newly cleared, and the brambles still felt themselves its true and rightful possessors. Who was this puny-looking, good-for-nothing foreigner, that they should be turned out of house and home for his accommodation? So they seemed to be asking among themselves, as they lifted up their heads here and there in the midst of the pale-green shoots. The crows, on the other hand, bade the new-

comer welcome, — as the wolf welcomes the lamb. Against these hungry lovers of his crop (who loved not unwisely, but too well), the farmer had fenced his field with a single string, stretched from corner to corner. He must put extraordinary faith in the considerateness of the birds, a looker-on might think; such a barrier as this could be, at the most, nothing more than a polite hint of ownership, a delicate reminder against thoughtless trespassing, a courteously indirect suggestion to such as needed not a physical, but only a moral, restraint. Or one might take it as an appeal to some known or fancied superstitiousness on the crows' part; as if the white cord were a kind of fetich, with which they would never presume to meddle. But the rustic would have laughed at all such far-fetched cockneyish inferences. This strange-seeming device of his was simply an attempt to take the suspicious in their own suspiciousness; to set before Corvus a hindrance so unmistakably insufficient that he would mistrust it as a cover for some deep-laid and deadly plot. Probably the scheme had not been crowned with complete success in the present in-

stance, for from a pole in the middle of the inclosure a dead crow was dangling in the breeze. This was a more business-like signal than the other; even a cockney could hardly be in doubt as to its meaning; and the farmer, when I afterwards met him, assured me that it had answered its purpose to perfection. The crow is nobody's fool. "Live and learn" is his motto; and he does both, but especially the former, in a way to excite the admiration of all disinterested observers. In the long struggle between human ingenuity and corvine sagacity, it is doubtful which has thus far obtained the upper hand. Nor have I ever quite convinced myself which of the contestants has the better case. "The crow is a thief," the planter declares; "he should confine himself to a wild diet, or else sow his own garden." "Yes, yes," Corvus makes reply; "but if I steal your corn, you first stole my land." Unlike his cousin the raven, — who, along with the Indian, has retreated before the pale-face, — the crow is no ultra-conservative. Civilization and modern ideas are not in the least distasteful to him. He has an unfeigned

respect for agriculture, and in fact may be said himself to have set up as gentleman-farmer, letting out his land on shares, and seldom failing to get his full half of the crop; and, like the shrewd manager that he is, he insures himself against drought and other mischances by taking his moiety early in the season. As I plant no acres myself, I perhaps find it easier than some of my fellow-citizens to bear with the faults and appreciate the virtues of this sable aboriginal. Long may he live, I say, this true lover of his native land, to try the patience and sharpen the wits of his would-be exterminators.

The crow's is only the common lot. The whole earth is one field of war. Every creature's place upon it is coveted by some other creature. Plants and animals alike subsist by elbowing their rivals out of the way. Man, if he plants a corn-field, puts in no more grains than will probably have room to grow and thrive. But Nature, in her abhorrence of a vacuum, stands at no waste. She believes in competition, and feels no qualms at seeing the weak go to the wall.

"The good old rule
Sufficeth her, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can."

If she wishes a single oak, she drops acorns without number. Her recklessness equals that of some ambitious military despot, to whom ten thousand or a hundred thousand dead soldiers count as nothing, if only the campaign be fought through to victory.

Man's economy and Nature's prodigality, — here they were in typical operation, side by side. The corn was in "hills" uniformly spaced, and evidently the proprietor had already been at work with plough and hoe, lest the weeds should spring up and choke it; but just beyond stood a perfect thicket of wild-cherry shrubs, so huddled together that not one in twenty could possibly find room in which to develop. If they were not all of them stunted beyond recovery, it would be only because a few of the sturdiest should succeed in crowding down and killing off their weaker competitors.

The import of this apparent wastefulness and cruelty of Nature, her seeming indifference to the welfare of the individual, is a

question on which it is not pleasant, and, as I think, not profitable, to dwell. We see but parts of her ways, and it must be unsafe to criticise the working of a single wheel here or there, when we have absolutely no means of knowing how each fits into the grand design, and, for that matter, can only guess at the grand design itself. Rather let us content ourselves with the prudent saying of that ancient agnostic, Bildad the Shuhite: "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing." The wisest of us are more or less foolish, by nature and of necessity; but it seems a gratuitous superfluity of folly to ignore our own ignorance. For one, then, I am in no mood to propose, much less to undertake, any grand revolution in the order of natural events. Indeed, as far as I am personally concerned, I fear it would be found but a dubious improvement if the wildness were quite taken out of the world, — if its wilderness, according to the word of the prophet, were to become all like Eden. Tameness is not the only good quality, whether of land or of human nature.

As I sat on my comfortable log (the noble

old tree had not been cut down for nothing), birds of many kinds came and went about me. Wordsworth's couplet would have suited my case: —

> "The birds around me hopped and played,
> Their thoughts I cannot measure;"

but I could hardly have rounded out the quotation; for, joyful as I believed the creatures to be, many of their motions were plainly not "thrills of pleasure," but tokens of fear. It was now the very heyday of life with them, when they are at once happiest and most wary. There were secrets to be kept close; eggs and little ones, whose whereabouts must on no account be divulged. For the birds, too, not less than the corn, the bramble, and the cherry, not less even than the saint, find this earthly life a daily warfare.

The artless ditty of the mourning warbler came to my ears at intervals out of a tangle of shrubbery, and once or twice he allowed me glimpses of his quaint attire. I would gladly have seen and heard much more of him, but he evaded all my attempts at familiarity. Nor could I blame him for his furtive behavior. How was he to be cer-

tain that I was no collector, but only an innocent admirer of birds in the bush? Sought after as his carcass is by every New England ornithologist, the mourning warbler exercises only a reasonable discretion in fighting shy of every animal that walks upright.

It is evident, however, that for birds, as for ourselves, the same thing often has both a bright and a dark side. If men are sometimes heartless, and never to be altogether confided in, yet at the same time their doings are in various respects conducive to the happiness and increase of feathered life; and this not only in the case of some of the more familiar species, but even in that of many which still retain all their natural shyness of human society. A clearing like that in which I was now resting offers an excellent illustration of this; for it is a rule without exceptions that in such a place one may see and hear more birds in half an hour than are likely to be met with in the course of a long day's tramp through the unbroken forest. The mourning warbler himself likes a roadside copse better than a deep wood, jealous as he may be of

man's approach. Up to a certain point, civilization is a blessing, even to birds. Beyond a certain point, for aught I know, it may be nothing but a curse, even to men.

Here, then, I sat, now taken up with the beautiful landscape, and anon turning my head to behold some fowl of the air. I might have mused with Emerson, —

> "Knows he who tills this lonely field,
> To reap its scanty corn,
> What mystic fruit his acres yield
> At midnight and at morn,"

— only "mystic fruit" would have been rather too high-sounding a phrase for my commonplace cogitations. Hermit thrushes, olive-backed thrushes, and veeries, with sundry warblers and a scarlet tanager, sang in chorus from the woods behind me, while in front bluebirds, robins, song sparrows, vesper sparrows, and chippers were doing their best to transform this fresh Vermont clearing into a time-worn Massachusetts pasture; assisted meanwhile by a goldfinch who flew over my head with an ecstatic burst of melody, and a linnet who fell to warbling with characteristic fluency from a

neighboring tree-top. At least two pairs of rose-breasted grosbeaks had summer quarters here; and busy enough they looked, flitting from one side of the garden to another, yet not too busy for a tune between whiles. One of the males was in really gorgeous plumage. The rose-color had run over, as it were (like Aaron's "precious ointment"), and spilled all down his breast. It is hard for me ever to think of this brilliant, tropically dressed grosbeak as a true Northerner; and here once more I was for the moment surprised to hear him and the olive-backed thrush singing together in the same wood. Could such neighborliness have any patriotic significance? I was almost ready to ask. Across the corn-field a Traill's flycatcher was tossing up his head pertly, and vociferating *kwee-kwee*. I took it for a challenge: "Find my nest if you can, brother!" But I found nothing. Nor was I more successful with a humming-bird, who had chosen the tip of a charred stub, only a few rods from my seat, for his favorite perch. Again and again I saw him there preening his feathers, and once or twice I tried to inveigle him into betraying his secret. Either

his house was further off than I suspected, however, or else he was too cunning to fall into my snare. At any rate, he permitted me to trample all about the spot, without manifesting the first symptom of uneasiness.

What a traveler the humming-bird is! I myself had come perhaps three hundred miles, and had accounted it a long, tiresome journey, notwithstanding I had been brought nearly all the way in a carriage elaborately contrived for comfort, and moving over iron rails. But this tiny insect-like creature spent last winter in Central America, or it may be in Cuba, and now here he sat, perfectly at home again in this Green Mountain nook; and next autumn he will be off again betimes, as the merest matter of course, for another thousand-mile flight. Verily, a marvelous spirit and energy may be contained within a few ounces of flesh! But if Trochilus be indeed Prospero's servant in disguise, as one of our poets makes out, why, then, to be sure, his flittings back and forth are little to wonder at. How slow, overgrown, and clumsy human beings must look in his eyes! I wonder if he is never tempted to laugh at us. Who knows

but humming-birds have it for a by-word, "As awkward as a man"?

My ruminations were suddenly broken in upon by the approach of a carriage, driven by a boy of perhaps ten years, a son of the farmer from whose land I was, as it were, gathering the first fruits. We had made each other's acquaintance the day before, and now, as he surmounted the hill, he stopped to inquire politely whether I would ride with him. Yes, I answered, I would gladly be carried into the forest a little way. It proved a very little way indeed; for the road was heavy from recent rains, and the poor old hack was so short of breath that he could barely drag us along, and at every slump of the wheels came to a dead standstill. "Pity for a horse o'erdriven" soon compelled me to take to the woods, in spite of the protestations of my charioteer, who assured me that his steed *could* trot "like everything," if he only would. It is an extremely unpatriotic Vermonter, I suspect (I have never yet discovered him), who will not brag a little over his horse; and I was rather pleased than otherwise to hear my flaxen-haired friend

set forth the good points of his beast, even while he confessed that the "heaves" were pretty bad. I was glad, too, to find the youngster in a general way something of an optimist. When I asked him how long the land had been cleared, he pointed to one corner of it, and responded, using the pronoun with perfect *naïveté*, "We cleared up that piece last fall;" and on my inquiring whether it was not hard work, he replied, in a tone of absolute satisfaction, "Oh, yes, but you get your pay for it." Evidently he believed in Green Mountain land, which I thought a very fortunate circumstance. "Be content with such things as ye have," said the Apostle; and it is certainly easier to obey the precept if one looks upon his own things as the best in the world. My youthful philosopher seemed to consider it altogether natural and reasonable that prosperity, instead of coming of itself, should have to be earned by the sweat of the brow. Perhaps the crow and the cherry-tree are equally unsophisticated. Perhaps, too, men's fates are less uneven than is sometimes supposed. For I could not help thinking that if this boy should retain his present view of things, he

would pass his days more happily than many a so-called favorite of fortune.

On my way back to the inn I met an old man from the lowlands, driving over the mountains for the first time since boyhood. "You have a pretty good farming country here," he called out cheerily, — "a little rolling." He took me for a native, and I hope to be forgiven for not disclaiming the compliment.

As I write, I find myself wondering how my nameless farmer's crop is prospered. In my corner of the world we have lately been afflicted with drought. I hope it has been otherwise on his hillside plateau. In my thought, at all events, his corn is now fully tasseled, and waves in a pleasant mountain wind, all green and shining.

BEHIND THE EYE.

As what he sees is, so have his thoughts been. — MATTHEW ARNOLD.

NOTHING is seen until it is separated from its surroundings. A man looks at the landscape, but the tree standing in the middle of the landscape he does not see until, for the instant at least, he singles it out as the object of vision. Two men walk the same road; as far as the bystander can perceive, they have before them the same sights; but let them be questioned at the end of the journey, and it will appear that one man saw one set of objects, and his companion another; and the more diverse the intellectual training and habits of the two travelers, the greater will be the discrepancy between the two reports.

And what is true of any two men is equally true of any one man at two different times. To-day he is in a dreamy, reflective mood, — he has been reading Wordsworth,

perhaps, — and when he takes his afternoon saunter he looks at the bushy hillside, or at the wayside cottage, or down into the loitering brook, and he sees in them all such pictures as they never showed him before. Or he is in a matter-of-fact mood, a kind of stock-market frame of mind ; and he looks at everything through economical spectacles, — as if he had been set to appraise the acres of meadow or woodland through which he passes. At another time he may have been reading some book or magazine article written by Mr. John Burroughs; and although he knows nothing of birds, and can scarcely tell a crow from a robin (perhaps for this very reason), he is certain to have tantalizing glimpses of some very strange and wonderful feathered specimens. They must be rarities, at least, if not absolute novelties; and likely enough, on getting home, he sits down and writes to Mr. Burroughs a letter full of gratitude and inquiry, — the gratitude very pleasant to receive, we may presume, and the inquiries quite impossible to answer.

Some men (not many, it is to be hoped) are specialists, and nothing else. They are

absorbed in farming, or in shoemaking, in chemistry, or in Latin grammar, and have no thought for anything beyond or beside. Others of us, while there may be two or three subjects toward which we feel some special drawing, have nevertheless a general interest in whatever concerns humanity. We are different men on different days. There is a certain part of the year, say from April to July, when I am an ornithologist; for the time being, as often as I go out-of-doors, I have an eye for birds, and, comparatively speaking, for nothing else. Then comes a season during which my walks all take on a botanical complexion. I have had my turn at butterflies, also; for one or two summers I may be said to have seen little else but these winged blossoms of the air. I know, too, what it means to visit the seashore, and scarcely to notice the breaking waves because of the shells scattered along the beach. In short, if I see one thing, I am of necessity blind, or half-blind, to all beside. There are several men in me, and not more than one or two of them are ever at the window at once. Formerly, my enjoyment of nature was altogether reflective,

imaginative; in a passive, unproductive sense, poetical. I delighted in the woods and fields, the seashore and the lonely road, not for the birds or flowers to be found there, but for the "serene and blessed mood" into which I was put by such friendship. Later in life, it transpired, as much to my surprise as to anybody's else, that I had a bent toward natural history, as well as toward nature; an inclination to study, as well as to dream over, the beautiful world about me. I must know the birds apart, and the trees, and the flowers. A bit of country was no longer a mere landscape, a picture, but a museum as well. For a time the poet seemed to be dead within me; and happy as I found myself in my new pursuits, I had fits of bewailing my former condition. Science and fancy, it appeared, would not travel hand in hand; if a man must be a botanist, let him bid good-by to the Muse. Then I fled again to Emerson and Wordsworth, trying to read the naturalist asleep and reawaken the poet. Happy thought! The two men, the student and the lover, were still there; and there they remain to this day. Sometimes one is at the window, sometimes the other.

So it is, undoubtedly, with other people. My fellow-travelers, who hear me discoursing enthusiastically of vireos and warblers, thrushes and wrens, whilst they see never a bird, unless it be now and then an English sparrow or a robin, talk sometimes as if the difference between us were one of eyesight. They might as well lay it to the window-glass of our respective houses. It is not the eye that sees, but the man behind the eye.

As to the comparative advantages and disadvantages of such a division of interests as I have been describing, there may be room for two opinions. If distinction be all that the student hungers for, perhaps he cannot limit himself too strictly; but for myself, I think I should soon tire of my own society if I were only one man, — a botanist or a chemist, an artist, or even a poet. I should soon tire of myself, I say; but I might have said, with equal truth, that I should soon tire of nature; for if I were only one man, I should see only one aspect of the natural world. This may explain why it is that some persons must be forever moving from place to place. If they travel

the same road twice or thrice, or even to the hundredth time, they see only one set of objects. The same man is always at the window. No wonder they are restless and famished. For my own part, though I should delight to see new lands and new people, new birds and new plants, I am nevertheless pretty well contented where I am. If I take the same walks, I do not see the same things. The botanist spells the dreamer; and now and then the lover of beauty keeps the ornithologist in the background till he is thankful to come once more to the window, though it be only to look at a bluebird or a song sparrow.

How much influence has the will in determining which of these several tenants of a man's body shall have his turn at sight-seeing? It would be hard to answer definitely. As much, it may be, as a teacher has over his pupils, or a father over his children; something depends upon the strength of the governing will, and something upon the tractability of the pupil. In general, I assume to command. As I start on my ramble I give out word, as it were, which of the men shall have the front seat. But

there are days when some one of them proves too much both for me and for his fellows. It is not the botanist's turn, perhaps; but he takes his seat at the window, notwithstanding, and the ornithologist and the dreamer must be content to peep at the landscape over his shoulders.

On such occasions, it may as well be confessed, I make but a feeble remonstrance; and for the sufficient reason that I feel small confidence in my own wisdom. If the flower-lover or the poet must have the hour, then in all likelihood he ought to have it. So much I concede to the nature of things. A strong tendency is a strong argument, and of itself goes far to justify itself. I borrow no trouble on the score of such compulsions. On the contrary, my lamentations begin when nobody sues for the place of vision. Such days I have; blank days, days to be dropped from the calendar; when "those that look out of the windows be darkened." The fault is not with the world, nor with the eye. The old preacher had the right of it; it is not the windows that are darkened, but "those that look out of the windows."

A NOVEMBER CHRONICLE.

I 've gathered young spring-leaves, and flowers gay. — KEATS.

I LOOKED forward to the month with peculiar interest, as it was many years since I had passed a November in the country, and now that it is over I am moved to publish its praises: partly, as I hope, out of feelings of gratitude, and partly because it is an agreeable kind of originality to commend what everybody else has been in the habit of decrying.

In the first place, then, it was a month of pleasant weather; something too much of wind and dust (the dust for only the first ten days) being almost the only drawback. To me, with my prepossessions, it was little short of marvelous how many of the days were nearly or quite cloudless. The only snow fell on the 11th. I saw a few flakes in the afternoon, just enough to be counted, and there must have been another slight

flurry after dark, as the grass showed white in favorable spots early the next morning. Making allowance for the shortness of the days, I doubt whether there has been a month during the past year in which a man could comfortably spend more of his time in out-of-door exercise.

The trees were mostly bare before the end of October, but the apple and cherry trees still kept their branches green (they are foreigners, and perhaps have been used to a longer season), and the younger growth of gray birches lighted up the woodlands with pale yellow. Of course the oak-leaves were still hanging, also; and for that matter they are hanging yet, and will be for months to come, let the north wind blow as it may. I wonder whether their winter rustling sounds as cold in other ears as in mine. My own feeling is most likely the result of boyish associations. How often I waded painfully through the forest paths, my feet and hands half frozen, while these ghosts of summer shivered sympathetically on every side as they saw me pass! I wonder, too, what can be the explanation of this unnatural oak-tree habit. The leaves are

dead; why should they not obey the general law, — "ashes to ashes, dust to dust"? Is our summer too short to ripen them, and so to perfect the articulation? Whatever its cause, their singular behavior does much to beautify the landscape; particularly in such a district as mine, where the rocky hills are, so many of them, covered with young oak forests, which, especially for the first half of November, before the foliage is altogether faded, are dressed in subdued shades of maroon, beautiful at all hours, but touched into positive glory by the level rays of the afternoon sun.

I began on the very first day of the month to make a list of the plants found in bloom, and happening, a week afterward, to be in the company of two experienced botanical collectors, I asked them how many species I was likely to find. One said thirty. The other, after a little hesitation, replied, "I don't know, but I should n't think you could find a dozen." Well, it is true that November is not distinctively a floral month in Massachusetts, but before its thirty days were over I had catalogued seventy-three species, though for six of these, to be sure,

I have to thank one of the collectors just now mentioned. Indeed, I found thirty-nine sorts on my first afternoon ramble; and even as late as the 27th and 28th I counted twelve. All in all, there is little doubt that at least a hundred kinds of plants were in bloom about me during the month.

Having called my record a chronicle, I should be guilty of an almost wanton disregard of scriptural models if I did not fill it largely with names, and accordingly I do not hesitate to subjoin a full list of these my November flowers; omitting Latin titles, — somewhat unwillingly, I confess, — except where the vernacular is wanting altogether, or else is more than commonly ambiguous: — creeping buttercup, tall buttercup, field larkspur, celandine, pale corydalis, hedge mustard, shepherd's-purse, wild peppergrass, sea-rocket, wild radish, common blue violet, bird-foot violet, pansy, Deptford pink, common chickweed, larger mouse-ear chickweed, sand spurrey, knawel, common mallow, herb-robert, storksbill, red clover, alsyke, white clover, white sweet clover, black medick, white avens, common cinque-foil, silvery cinque-foil, witch-hazel,

common evening-primrose, smaller evening-primrose, carrot, blue-stemmed golden-rod, white golden-rod (or silvery-rod), seaside golden-rod, *Solidago juncea*, *Solidago rugosa*, dusty golden-rod, early golden-rod, corymbed aster, wavy-leaved aster, heart-leaved aster, many-flowered aster, *Aster vimineus*, *Aster diffusus*, New York aster, *Aster puniceus*, narrow-leaved aster, fleabane, horse-weed, everlasting, cudweed, coneflower, mayweed, yarrow, tansy, groundsel, burdock, Canada thistle, fall dandelion, common dandelion, sow thistle, Indian tobacco, bell-flower (*Campanula rapunculoides*), fringed gentian, wild toad-flax, butter and eggs, self-heal, motherwort, jointweed, doorweed, and ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes cernua*).

Here, then, we have seventy-three species, all but one of which (*Spiranthes cernua*) are of the class of exogens. Twenty-two orders are represented, the great autumnal family of the *Compositæ* naturally taking the lead, with thirty species (sixteen of them asters and golden-rods), while the mustard, pink, and pulse families come next, with five species each. The large and

hardy heath family is wanting altogether. Out of the whole number about forty-three are indigenous. Witch-hazel is the only shrub, and, as might have been expected, there is no climbing plant.

In setting down such a list one feels it a pity that so few of the golden-rods and asters have any specific designation in English. Under this feeling, I have presumed myself to name two of the golden-rods, *Solidago Canadensis* and *Solidago nemoralis.* With us, at all events, the former is the first of its genus to blossom, and may appropriately enough wear the title of early golden-rod, while the latter must have been noticed by everybody for its peculiar grayish, "dusty-miller" foliage. It has, moreover, an exceptional right to a vernacular name, being both one of the commonest and one of the showiest of our roadside weeds. Till something better is proposed, therefore, let us call it the dusty golden-rod.

It must in fairness be acknowledged that I did not stand upon the quality of my specimens. Many of them were nothing but accidental and not very reputable-looking laggards; but in November, especially

if one is making a list, a blossom is a blossom. The greater part of the asters and golden-rods, I think, were plants that had been broken down by one means or another, and now, at this late day, had put forth a few stunted sprays. The narrow-leaved aster (*Aster linariifolius*) seemed peculiarly out of season, and was represented by only two heads, but these sufficed to bring the mouth-filling name into my catalogue. Of the two species of native violets I saw but a single blossom each. My pansy (common enough in gardens, and blooming well into December) was, of course, found by the roadside, and the larkspur likewise, as I made nothing of any but wild plants.

At this time of the year one must not expect to pick flowers anywhere and everywhere, and a majority of all my seventy-three species (perhaps as many as two thirds) were found only in one or more of three particular places. The first of these was along a newly laid-out road through a tract of woodland; the second was a sheltered wayside nook between high banks; and the third was at the seashore. At this last place, on the 8th of the month, I came

unexpectedly upon a field fairly yellow with fall dandelions and silvery cinque-foils, and affording also my only specimens of burdock, Canada thistle, cone-flower, and the smaller evening-primrose; in addition to which were the many-flowered aster, yarrow, red clover, and sow thistle. In truth, the grassy hillside was quite like a garden, although there was no apparent reason why it should be so favored. The larger evening-primrose, of which I saw two stalks, one of them bearing six or eight blossoms, was growing among the rocks just below the edge of the cliff, in company with abundance of sow thistle, all perfectly fresh; while along the gravelly edge of the bank, just above them, was the groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*), looking as bright and thrifty as if it had been the first of August instead of near the middle of November.

Perhaps my most surprising bit of good luck was the finding of the Deptford pink. Of this, for some inscrutable reason, one plant still remained green and showed several rosy blossoms, while all its fellows, far and near, were long since bleached and dead. Fortune has her favorites, even

among pinks. The frail-looking, early-blooming corydalis (we have few plants that appear less able to bear exposure) was in excellent condition up to the very end of the month, though the one patch then explored was destitute of flowers. These were as pretty as could be — prettier even than in May, I thought — on the 16th, and no doubt might have been found on the 30th, with careful search. The little geranium known as herb-robert is a neighbor of the corydalis, and, like it, stands the cold remarkably well. Its reddening, finely cut leaves were fresh and flourishing, but though I often looked for its flowers, I found only one during the entire month. The storksbill, its less known cousin, does not grow within my limits, but came to me from Essex County, through the kindness of a friend, being one of the six species contributed by her, as I have before mentioned.

The hardiness of some of these late bloomers is surprising. It is now the 2d of December, and yesterday the temperature fell about thirty degrees below the freezing-point, yet I notice shepherd's-purse, peppergrass, chickweed, and knawel still

bearing fresh-looking flowers. Nor are they the only plants that seem thus impervious to cold. The prostrate young St. John's-wort shoots, for instance, all uncovered and delicate as they are, appear not to know that winter with all its rigors is upon them.

It was impossible not to sympathize admiringly with some of my belated asters and golden-rods. Their perseverance was truly pathetic. They had been hindered, but they meant to finish their appointed task, nevertheless, in spite of short days and cold weather. I have especially in mind a plant of *Solidago juncea*. The species is normally one of the earliest, following hard upon *Solidago Canadensis*, but for some reason this particular specimen did not begin to flower till after the first heavy frosts. Indeed, when I first noticed it, the stem leaves were already frost-bitten; yet it kept on putting forth blossoms for at least a fortnight. Whatever may be true of the lilies of the field, this golden-rod was certainly a toiler, and of the most persistent sort.

Early in the month the large and hardy Antiopa butterflies were still not uncommon in the woods, and on the 3d — a delightful,

summer-like day, in which I made a pilgrimage to Walden — I observed a single clouded-sulphur (Philodice), looking none the worse for the low temperature of the night before, when the smaller ponds had frozen over for the first time.

Of course I kept account of the birds as well as of the flowers, but the number, both of individuals and of species, proved to be surprisingly small, the total list being as follows: — great black-backed gull, American herring gull, ruffed grouse, downy woodpecker, flicker, blue jay, crow, horned lark, purple finch, red crossbill, goldfinch, snow bunting, Ipswich sparrow, white-throated sparrow, tree sparrow, snowbird, song sparrow, fox sparrow, Northern shrike, myrtle warbler, brown creeper, white-breasted nuthatch, chickadee, golden-crowned kinglet, and robin. Here are only twenty-five species; a meagre catalogue, which might have been longer, it is true, but for the patriotism or prejudice (who will presume always to decide between these two feelings, one of them so given to counterfeiting the other?) which would not allow me to piece it out with the name of that all too numerous parasite, the so-called English sparrow.

My best ornithological day was the 17th, which, with a friend like-minded, I passed at Ipswich Beach. The special object of our search was the Ipswich sparrow, a bird unknown to science until 1868, when it was discovered at this very place by Mr. Maynard. Since then it has been found to be a regular fall and winter visitant along the Atlantic coast, passing at least as far south as New Jersey. It is a mystery how the creature could so long have escaped detection. One cannot help querying whether there can be another case like it. Who knows? Science, even in its flourishing modern estate, falls a trifle short of omniscience.

My comrade and I separated for a little, losing sight of each other among the sand-hills, and when we came together again he reported that he had seen the sparrow. He had happened upon it unobserved, and had been favored with excellent opportunities for scrutinizing it carefully through a glass at short range; and being familiar with its appearance through a study of cabinet specimens, he had no doubt whatever of its identity. This was within five minutes of

our arrival, and naturally we anticipated no difficulty in finding others; but for two or three hours we followed the chase in vain. Twice, to be sure, a sparrow of some sort flew up in front of us, but in both cases it got away without our obtaining so much as a peep at it. Up and down the beach we went, exploring the basins and sliding down the smooth, steep hills. Every step was interesting, but it began to look as if I must go home without seeing *Ammodramus princeps*. But patience was destined to have its reward, and just as we were traversing the upper part of the beach for the last time, I caught a glimpse of a bird skulking in the grass before us. He had seen us first, and was already on the move, ducking behind the scattered tufts of beach-grass, crouching and running by turns; but we got satisfactory observations, nevertheless, and he proved to be, like the other, an Ipswich sparrow. He did not rise, but finally made off through the grass without uttering a sound. Then we examined his footprints, and found them to be, so far as could be made out, the same as we had been noticing all about among the hills.

Meanwhile, our perambulations had not been in vain. Flocks of snow buntings were seen here and there, and we spent a long time in watching a trio of horned larks. These were feeding amid some stranded rubbish, and apparently felt not the slightest suspicion of the two men who stood fifteen or twenty feet off, eying their motions. It was too bad they could not hear our complimentary remarks about their costumes, so tastefully trimmed with black and yellow. Our loudest exclamations, however, were called forth by a dense flock of sea-gulls at the distant end of the beach. How many hundreds there were I should not dare to guess, but when they rose in a body their white wings really filled the air, and with the bright sunlight upon them they made, for a landsman, a spectacle to be remembered.

Altogether it was a high day for two enthusiasts, though no doubt it would have looked foolish enough to ordinary mortals, our spending several dollars of money and a whole day of time, — in November, at that, — all for the sake of ogling a few birds, not one of which we even attempted to shoot.

But what then? Tastes will differ; and as for enthusiasm, it is worth more than money and learning put together (so I believe, at least, without having experimented with the other two) as a producer of happiness. For my own part, I mean to be enthusiastic as long as possible, foreseeing only too well that high spirits cannot last forever.

The sand-hills themselves would have repaid all our trouble. Years ago this land just back of the beach was covered with forest, while at one end of it was a flourishing farm. Then when man, with his customary foolishness, cut off the forest, Nature revenged herself by burying his farm. We did not verify the fact, but according to the published accounts of the matter it used to be possible to walk over the grave of an old orchard, and pick here and there an apple from some topmost branch still jutting out through the sand.

Among the dunes we found abundance of a little red, heath-like plant, still in full blossom. Neither of us recognized it, but it turned out to be jointweed (*Polygonum articulatum*), and made a famous addition to my November flower catalogue.

In connection with all this I ought, perhaps, to say a word about our Ipswich driver, especially as naturalists are sometimes reprehended for taking so much interest in all other creatures, and so little in their fellow-men. As we drew near the beach, which is some five miles from the town, we began to find the roads quite under water, with the sea still rising. We remarked the fact, the more as we were to return on foot, whereupon the man said that the tide was uncommonly high on account of the heavy rain of the day before! A little afterward, when we came in sight of a flock of gulls, he gravely informed us that they were "some kind of ducks"! He had lived by the seashore all his life, I suppose, and of course felt entirely competent to instruct two innocent cockneys such as he had in his wagon.

Four days after this I made a trip to Nahant. If *Ammodramus princeps* was at Ipswich, why should it not be at other similar places? True enough, I found the birds feeding beside the road that runs along the beach. I chased them about for an hour or two in a cold high wind, and stared at them

till I was satisfied. They fed much of the time upon the golden-rods, alighted freely upon the fence-posts (which is what some writers would lead us never to expect), and often made use of the regular family *tseep*. Two of them kept persistently together, as if they were mated. One staggered me by showing a blotch in the middle of the breast, a mark that none of the published descriptions mention, but which I have since found exemplified in one of the skins at the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, in Cambridge.

"A day is happily spent that shows me any bird I never saw alive before." So says Dr. Coues, and he would be a poor ornithologist who could not echo the sentiment. The Ipswich sparrow was the third such bird that I had seen during the year without going out of New England, the other two being the Tennessee warbler and the Philadelphia vireo.

Of the remainder of my November list there is not much to be said. Robins were very scarce after the first week. My last glimpse of them was on the 20th, when I saw two. Tree sparrows, snowbirds, chick-

adees, kinglets, crows, and jays were oftenest met with, while the shrike, myrtle warbler, purple finch, and song sparrow were represented by one individual each. My song sparrow was not seen till the 28th, after I had given him up. He did not sing (of course he scolded; the song sparrow can always do that), but the mere sight of him was enough to suggest thoughts of springtime, especially as he happened to be in the neighborhood of some Pickering hylas, which were then in full cry for the only time during the month. Near the end of the month many wild geese flew over the town, but, thanks to a rebellious tooth (how happy are the birds in this respect!), I was shut indoors, and knew the fact only by hearsay. I did, however, see a small flock on the 30th of October, an exceptionally early date. As it chanced, I was walking at the time with one of my neighbors, a man more than forty years old, and he assured me that he had never seen such a thing before.

For music, I one day heard a goldfinch warbling a few strains, and on the 21st a chickadee repeated his clear phœbe whistle

two or three times. The chickadees are always musical, — there is no need to say that; but I heard them *sing* only on this one morning.

Altogether, with the cloudless, mild days, the birds, the tree-frogs, the butterflies, and the flowers, November did not seem the bleak and cheerless season it has commonly been painted. Still it was not exactly like summer. On the last day I saw some very small boys skating on the Cambridge marshes, and the next morning December showed its hand promptly, sending the mercury down to within two or three degrees of zero.

NEW ENGLAND WINTER.

While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons, I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. — THOREAU.

THOSE who will have us all to be studying the Sacred Books of the East, and other such literature, are given to laying it down as an axiom that whoever knows only one religion knows none at all, — an assertion, I am bound to acknowledge, that commends itself to my reason, notwithstanding the somewhat serious inferences fairly deducible from it touching the nature and worth of certain convictions of my own, which I have been wont to look upon as religious. I cannot profess ever to have pried into the mysteries of any faith except Christianity. So, of course, I do not understand even that. And the people about me, so far as I can discover, are all in the same predicament. Yet I would fain believe that we are not exactly heathen. Some of my neighbors (none too many of them, I confess) are

charitable and devout. They must be pleasing to their Creator, I say to myself, unless He is hard to please. Sometimes I go so far as to think that possibly a man may be religious without *knowing* even his own religion. Let us hope so. Otherwise, we of the laity are assuredly undone.

And what is true of creeds and churches is true likewise of countries and climates. We grow wise by comparison of one thing with another, not by direct and exclusive contemplation of one thing by itself. Human knowledge is relative, not absolute, and the inveterate stayer at home is but a poor judge of his own birthplace.

All this I have in lively remembrance as I sit down to record some impressions of our New England winter. With what propriety do I discourse upon winter in Massachusetts, having never passed one anywhere else? Had I spent a portion of my life where roses bloom the year round, then, to be sure, I might assume to say something to the purpose about snow and ice.

But if the "tillers of paper" wrote only of such topics as they possessed full and accurate acquaintance with, how would the

Scripture be fulfilled? "Of making many books" there surely would be an end, and that speedily. I venture to think, moreover, that a man may never have set foot beyond the boundaries of his native city, and yet prove a reasonably competent guide to its streets and by-ways. His information is circumscribed, but such as it is, it is precise and to the point. Though he assure you soberly that the principal thoroughfare of his tenth-rate town is more magnificent than any in New York or London, you may none the less depend upon him to pilot you safely out of its most intricate and bewildering corner. Indeed, he might fairly claim membership in what is, at present, one of the most flourishing of intellectual guilds: I mean the sect of the specialists; whose creed is that one may know something without knowing everything, and who choose for their motto: Remain ignorant in order that you may learn.

In this half-developed world there is nothing so perfect as to be past a liability to drawbacks and exceptions. The best of beef is poisonous to some eaters, and strawberries are an abomination to others; and

in like manner there is no climate, nor any single feature of any climate, but by some constitutions it will be found unendurable. The earth is to be populated throughout, so it would appear; and to that end sundry necessary precautions have been taken against human inertia. A certain proportion of boys must be born with a propensity for wandering and adventure; and the most favored spot must not contain within itself all conceivable advantages. If everybody could stand the rigors of New England weather, what would become of the rest of the continent?

Unless I misjudge myself, I should soon tire of perpetual summer. Like the ungrateful Israelites with the manna, my soul would loathe such light bread. To my provincial mind, as I believe, nothing else could ever quite take the place of a rotation of the seasons. There should be rain and shine, cold and heat. A change from good weather to bad, and back again, is on the whole better than unbroken good weather. Dullness to set off brightness, night to give relief to the day, such is the wise order of nature; and I do not account it altogether a token

of depravity that honest people, who love a paradox without knowing it, find perfection, of no matter how innocent a sort, just a little wearisome. Therefore, I say, let me have a year made up of well-defined contrasts; in short, a New England year, of four clearly marked seasons.

It is often alleged, I know, that we really have only three seasons; that winter leaps into the lap of summer, and spring is nothing but a myth of the almanac makers. I shall credit this story when I am convinced of the truth of another statement, equally current and equally well vouched, that every successive summer is the hottest (or the coldest) for the last twenty-five years. As there is no subject so much talked about as the weather, so, almost of course, there is none so much lied about. Winter claims most of March, as the astronomers give it leave to do, I believe; but April and May, despite a snow-storm or two in the former, and a torrid week in the latter, are neither summer nor winter, but spring; somewhat fickle, it is true, more or less uncertain of itself, but still retaining its personal identity.

As for our actual winter, it may enhance

its value in our eyes if we take into account that the three other seasons all depend upon it for their peculiar charms. In the case of spring this dependence is palpable to every one. Berate as we may its backwardness and deceit, muffle ourselves never so pettishly against its harsh breath, yea, even deny it all claim to its own proper title, yet anon it gets the better of our discontent, and we thank our stars that we have lived to see again the greening of the grass, and to hear once more the song of a bird. A mild day in March is like a foretaste of heaven; the first robin seems an angel; while saxifrage, anemones, and dandelions win kindly notice from many a matter-of-fact countryman who lets all the June roses go by him unregarded. It is pleasures of this kind, natural, wholesome, and universal, that largely make up the total of human happiness. Our instinct for them only strengthens with age. They are like the "divine ideas" of Olympian bards, —

> "Which always find us young,
> And always keep us so."

All this glory of the revival would be wanting but for the previous months of

desolation. The hepatica is not more beautiful than many another flower, but it takes us when we are hungry for the sight of a blossom. What can we do? When it peeps out of its bed of withered leaves, puts off its furs, and opens to the sunlight its little purple cup, we have no choice but to love it as we cannot love the handsomer and more fragrant hosts that follow in its train.

And as winter over and gone sets in brighter relief the warmth and resurrection of springtime, so does the shadow of its approach lend a real if somewhat indefinable attractiveness to the fall months. The blooming of the late flowers, the ripening of leaf and fruit, the frosty air, the flocking of birds, all the thousand signs of the autumnal season take on a kind of pathetic and solemn interest, as being but prelusive to the whiteness and deadness so soon to cover the earth. Indeed, if there were no winter, there could be neither spring nor autumn; nay, nor any summer. Leave out the snow and ice, and the whole round year would be metamorphosed; or, rather, the year itself would pass away, and nothing be left but time.

I am not yet a convert to the pessimistic doctrine that "all pleasure is merely relief from pain;" but I gladly believe that pain has its use in heightening subsequent happiness, and that one man's evil qualities (mine, for example) may partly atone for themselves by setting off the amiable characteristics of worthier men around him. It consoles me to feel that my neighbors seem better to themselves and to each other because of the abrupt antithesis between their dispositions and mine. It is better than nothing, if my failure can serve as a background for their virtuous success. With reverent thankfulness do I acknowledge the gracious and far-reaching frugality which, by one means and another, saves even my foolishness and imperfection from running altogether to waste.

Viewed in this light, as an offset or foil for the remainder of the year, we may say that the worse the winter is, the better it is. Within reasonable limits, it can hardly be too long or too rigorous. And just here, as it appears to me, our New England climate shows most admirably. Without being unendurably hot or insufferably cold, it does

offer us an abundant contrast. An opposition of one hundred and twenty-five degrees between January and July ought to be enough, one would say, to impress even the dullest imagination.

But winter has its positively favorable side, and is not to be passed off with merely negative compliments; as if it were like a toothache or a tiresome sermon, — something of which the only good word to be said is, that it cannot last forever. It is not to be charged as a defect upon cold weather that some people find it to disagree with them. We might as well chide the hill for putting a sick man out of breath. It is with persons as with plants: some are hardy, others not. The date-palm cannot be made to grow in Massachusetts; but is Massachusetts to blame for the palm-tree's incapacity? All things of which the specific office is to promote strength (exercise, food, climate) presuppose a degree of strength sufficient for their use. So it is with cold weather. Its proper effect is to brace and invigorate the system; but there must be vigor to start with. The law is universal: "To him that hath shall be given."

Enough, then, of apologies and negative considerations. There was never a good Yankee, of moderately robust health, and under fifty years of age, that did not welcome cold weather as a friend. Ask the school-boys, especially such as live in country places, whether summer or winter brings the greater pleasure. Two to one they will vote for winter. Or look back over your own childhood, and see whether the sports of winter-time do not seem, in the retrospect, to have been the very crown of the year. How vivid my own recollections are! Other seasons had their own distinctive felicities; the year was full of delights; but we watched for the first snow-fall and the first ice as eagerly as I now see elderly and sickly people watching for the first symptoms of summer. As well as I can remember, winter was never too long nor too cold, whatever may have been true of a single day now and then, when the old school-house, with its one small stove, and its eight or ten large windows, ought, in all reason, to have been condemned as uninhabitable. But the frolics out-of-doors! It makes the blood tingle even now to think

of them. How brief the days were! How cruel the authority that kept us in the house after dark, while so many of our mates were still "sliding down hill" (we knew nothing of "coasting" where I was born), or skating in the meadow! Childhood in the sunny South must be a very tame affair, New England youngsters being judges.

Trifles of this kind, if any be moved to call them such, are not to be sneered out of court. Fifteen years form no small part of a human life, and whatever helps us to grow up happy contributes in no slight degree to keep us happy to the end. "When I became a man I put away childish things"? Yes, it may be; but the very things that I boast of outgrowing have made me what I am. In truth, when it comes to such a question as this, I confess to putting more faith in the verdict of healthy children than in the unanimous theories and groans of whole congresses of valetudinarians. I am not yet so old nor so feeble but I gaze with something of my youthful enthusiasm upon the first snow. It quickens my pulse to see the ponds

frozen over, although my skates long since went out of commission; and I still find comfort in a tramp of five or six miles, with the path none too good, and the mercury half-way between the freezing point and zero. I like the buffeting of the north wind, and am not indisposed once in a while to wrestle with the frost for the possession of my own ears. Well as I love to loiter, I rejoice also in weather which makes loitering impossible; which puts new springs into a man's legs, and sets him spinning over the course whether he will or no. It will be otherwise with me by and by, I suppose, seeing how my venerable fellow-citizens are affected, but for the present nothing renews my physical youth more surely than a low temperature; a fact which I welcome as evidence that I am not yet going downhill, however closely I may be nearing the summit.

Winter does us the honor to assume that we are not weaklings. Summer may coddle and flatter, but cold weather is no sentimentalist. Its kindest and tenderest mood has something of a stoical severity about it. It lays its finger without mercy on our most

vulnerable and sensitive spots. But withal, as I have said, if we really possess any reserved strength, it knows how to bring it out and make the most of it. What a fullness of vitality do we suddenly develop as we come into close quarters with this well-intentioned but rough and ready antagonist! In fine, winter is one of those rare and invaluable friends of whom Emerson speaks, who enable us to do what we can. To its good offices it is largely attributable, no doubt, that in the long run the inhabitants of temperate regions have always been too powerful for their rivals within the tropics. Frigidity is like poverty, a blessing to those who can bear it.

Winter in New England is not a time for gathering flowers out-of-doors, though, taking the years together, there is no month of the twelve wherein one may not pick a few blossoms even in Massachusetts; but if it effaces one set of pictures, it paints for us another; and a wise and liberal taste will reckon itself a debtor to both. To say nothing of the half-dozen mornings on which every tree and bush is arrayed in all the splendor of diamonds, or the other

half-dozen when they bow themselves under masses of new-fallen snow, — making no account of such exceptional pageants, which, indeed, are often so destructive as to lose much of their glory in the eyes of provident spectators, — I, for my own part, find a beauty in the very commonest of winter landscapes. Let the ground be altogether white, or altogether brown, or let it be covered so thinly that the grass-blades show dark above the snow; in any case, white or brown, or white *and* brown, to me it is all beautiful; beautiful in itself, and also by contrast with the greenness before and after; while, as for the trees, I like them so well in their state of undress that I question sometimes whether their leafy garments do not conceal more loveliness than they confer. We are grateful, of course, to pines and spruces; but what if all trees were evergreen? A questionable improvement, surely. No; suggestive and solemn as the falling of the leaves must ever be to us who read our own destiny in the annual parable, it would be sadder still if there were no such alternation, no diversity, but only one monotonous year on year of changeless verdure.

Winter beauty, such as I have been hinting at, is not far to seek, whether by townsman or rustic. Bostonians have only to cross the Mill-Dam, — a rather too fashionable promenade, it is true, but even here one may be tolerably certain of elbow-room on a January morning. Often have I taken this road to health and happiness, waxing enthusiastic as I have proceeded, admiring the snow-bound scene with a fervor which the most opulent of summer landscapes seldom excites; and, pushing on with increasing exhilaration, have brought up at last on Corey Hill, where the inquisitive north-wind has very likely abbreviated my stay, but has never yet spoiled my rapture at the wonderful white world underneath.

Economy has its pleasures, it is said, for all healthily constituted minds. We like, all of us, to make much out of little; to do a notable piece of work with ordinary tools; to treat a meagre and commonplace theme in such a manner that whoever begins to read has no alternative but to finish; to tempt an epicure with the daintiest of repasts out of the simplest and fewest of every-day materials; to paint a picture

which has nothing in it, but compels the eye; in a word, to demonstrate to others, and not less to ourselves, that the secret of success lies in the man and not in the stuff. It is good, once in a while, to take advantage of a disadvantage to show what we can do.

On the same principle we are glad to find ourselves, if only not too often, in unpropitious circumstances. Otherwise how should we ever make proof of our philosophy? It heightens my confidence in the goodness at the heart of things to see how, as if by instinct, men of sound natures inevitably right the scale in seasons of loss and scarcity. If half the fortune disappears, the other half straightway doubles in value. Faith easily puts aside calculation, and proves, off-hand, that a part is equal to the whole.

Thus it is with me as a lover of out-door life, and especially as a field student of ornithology. At no time of the year does the fellowship of the birds afford me keener enjoyment than in the dead of winter. In June one may see them everywhere, and hear them at all hours; a few more or a

few less are nothing to make account of; but in January the sight of a single brown creeper is sufficient to brighten the day, and the twittering of half a dozen goldfinches is like the music of angels.

As a certain outspoken philosopher would not visit some of his relatives because he disliked to be alone, so do I in my jaunts avoid the highway whenever it is possible, even in midwinter. What so lonesome as the presence of people with whom we must not speak, or, worse yet, with whom we must speak, but only about the weather and like exciting topics! As I have intimated, however, it is usually the public street or nothing with me during the cold season. All the more grateful am I, therefore, to those familiar winter birds, some of whom are sure to bid me good morning out of the hedges and shade-trees as I go past. Not unlikely a shrike sits motionless and dumb upon a telegraph wire, or in contrary mood whistles and chirrups industriously from some tree-top. *He* is no angel, that is plain enough; but none the less I am glad to meet him. If he fails of being lovable, he is at least a study. It is wonderful how

abruptly his whim changes; how disconnected his behavior seems; how quickly and unexpectedly he can pass from the most perfect quiescence into a fit of most intense activity. I came upon such a fellow the other day in crossing the Common, who, just as I espied him, swooped upon a bunch of sparrows in an elm. He missed his aim, and in half a minute made a second attempt upon a similar group in another tree. This time he singled out one of the flock, and took chase after it; but the terrified creature ducked and turned, and finally got away, whereupon the shrike betook himself to a perch, and fell to making all manner of noises, — squeaks, whistles, twitters, and what not, — hopping about nervously meanwhile. The passers-by all stopped to look at the show (perhaps because they saw me staring upward), till finally a laborer yielded to the school-boy instinct and let fly a stone. The scamp was not greatly frightened by this demonstration, and merely flew to the tip of one of the tall cotton-woods, where he immediately resumed his vocal practice.

It ought to be helpful to a man's inde-

pendence of spirit to fall in once in a while with such a self-reliant and nonchalant brother. For one, I wish I were better able to profit by his example. He seems made for hard times and short rations. Doubtless it is a delusion of the fancy, but he and winter are so connected in my thought that I can hardly conceive of him as knowing what summer means, or as caring to know.

To a person of my tastes it is one of winter's capital recommendations that it brings its own birds with it, thus affording sundry ornithological pleasures which otherwise one would be compelled to go without. The tree-sparrows, for instance, are very good cold-weather acquaintances of mine. There is nothing peculiarly taking about their dress or demeanor; but they are steady-going, good-humored, diligent people, whose presence you may always depend upon. I lately witnessed a very pretty trick of theirs. It was in the marsh just over the fence from Beacon Street, where a company of the birds, a dozen perhaps, were breakfasting off the seeds of evening primrose. Less skillful acrobats than their neighbors and frequent traveling compan-

ions, the red-poll linnets, it is not easy for them to feed while hanging upon the pods. So, taking the weeds one by one, they alighted at the very tip, and then with various twitchings and stampings shook the stalk as violently as possible, after which they dropped quickly upon the snow to gather up the results of their labors. As I say, it was an extremely pretty performance, and by itself would have rewarded me for my morning tramp, putting me in mind, as it did, of happy hours long since past, when I climbed into the tops of nut-trees on business of the same sort. One of the principal uses of friendship, human or other, is this of keeping the heart young.

I hope I am not lacking in a wholesome disrespect for sentimentality and affectation; for artificial ecstasies over sunsets and landscapes, birds and flowers; the fashionable cant of nature-worship, which is enough almost to seal a true worshiper's lips under a vow of everlasting silence. But such repugnances belong to the library and the parlor, and are left behind when a man goes abroad, either by himself or in any other really good company. For my own part

the first lisp of a chickadee out of a wayside thicket disperses with a breath all such unhappy and unhallowed recollections. Here is a voice sincere, and the response is instantaneous and irresistible.

It would be a breach of good manners, an inexcusable ingratitude, to write never so briefly of the New England winter without noting this, the most engaging and characteristic enlivener of our winter woods; who revels in snow and ice, and is never lacking in abundant measures of faith and cheerfulness, enough not only for himself, but for any chance wayfarer of our own kind. He is every whit as independent as the shrike, but in how opposite a manner! — with a self-reliance that is never self-sufficiency, and bravery that offers no suspicion of bravado. Happy in himself, he is at the same time of a most companionable spirit. Perfect little philosopher! What a paradise New England would be if all her inhabitants were like him!

In such a winter climate as ours it is emphatically true that we "know not what shall be on the morrow." The season is not straitened in its resources, and caters

to all tastes in a way which some may look upon as fickleness, but which I prefer to regard as catholicity. Its days are of many types, and it spreads them out before us like a patient shopkeeper, — as if it recognized in the Yankee a customer hard to suit. I do not mean to affirm that the weather and I are never at odds; but all in all, in the long run and theoretically, I approve its methods. What a humdrum round life would be if nothing ever happened but the expected! I wonder if there are beings anywhere who have forgotten how it feels to be surprised. The children of this world, at all events, were not intended for any such condition of fixity. When there is no longer anything new *under* the sun, it will be time to get above it.

Even in so simple and regular a proceeding as a morning walk, one wishes always to see something new, or failing of that, something old in a new light; an easy enough task, if one has eyes. For as we cannot drink twice of the same river, so we cannot twice take the same ramble. I went over the same course yesterday and to-day; but yesterday's landscape and sky were dif-

ferent from to-day's. I saw different birds, and had different thoughts; and after all, the principal part of a walk is what goes on in the mind. Still, the activities of the intellect are greatly under the influence of external surroundings, a fact which makes largely in favor of a varied year like that we have been praising. The experience of it tends to widen and diversify the thinking of men. In a smaller degree it answers the same end as travel. For aught I know, it may possibly have its little share in the onerous task of liberalizing systems of theology. Who shall say that our New England climate, with its frequent and extreme contrasts, — what I have called its habit of catholicity, — may not have had more or less to do with that diffusion of free thought which has made the home of the Pilgrims the birthplace of heresies without number? The suggestion is fanciful, perhaps. Let it pass. Such profundities do not come within my province. Only I must believe that, even in the matter of weather, it is good for us to be educated out of bigotry into a large-minded toleration. Hence it is, in part, that I give my suffrage for our Massa-

chusetts winter, which not only widens the scope of the year, but contains within itself a variety wellnigh endless.

I have kept my subject out-of-doors. It is well always to have at least one point of originality. Let it be mine, in the present instance, that I have said nothing about the pleasures of the fireside, about long evenings and drawn curtains. If I were in winter's place, I should not greatly care to hear people tell how comfortable they could make themselves by jealously shutting me out. Their speech might be eloquent, and their language eulogistic; but somehow I should not feel that they were praising *me*.

A MOUNTAIN-SIDE RAMBLE.

I will go lose myself. — SHAKESPEARE.

THERE are two sayings of Scripture which to my mind seem peculiarly appropriate for pleasant Sundays, — "Behold the fowls of the air," and "Consider the lilies." The first is a morning text, as anybody may see, while the second is more conveniently practiced upon later in the day, when the dew is off the grass. With certain of the more esoteric doctrines of the Bible (the duty of turning the other cheek, for example, or of selling all that one has and giving to the poor) we may sometimes be troubled what to do, — unless, like the world in general, we turn them over to Count Tolstoï and his followers; but such precepts as I have quoted nobody is likely ever to quarrel with, least of all any "natural man." For myself, I find them always a comfort, no matter what my mood or condition, while their observance becomes doubly agreeable when I am away from home; the

thought of beholding a strange species of fowl, or of considering a new sort of lily, proving even more attractive than the prospect of listening to a new minister, or, what is somewhat less probable, of hearing a new sermon.

Thus it was with me, not long ago, when I found myself suddenly left alone at a small hotel in the Franconia Valley. The day was lowery, as days in the mountains are apt to be; but when duty goes along with inclination, a possible sprinkling is no very serious hindrance. Besides, a fortnight of "catching weather" had brought me into a state of something like philosophical indifference. I must be reckoned either with the just or with the unjust, — so I had come to reason, — and of course must expect now and then to be rained on. Accordingly, after dinner I tucked my faithful umbrella under my arm, and started up the Notch road.

I had in view a quiet, meditative ramble, in harmony with the spirit of the day, and could think of nothing more to the purpose than a visit to a pair of deserted farms, out in the woods on the mountain-side. The

lonesome fields and the crumbling houses would touch my imagination, and perhaps chasten my spirit. Thither would I go, and "consider the lilies." I am never much of a literalist, — except when a strict construction favors the argument, — and in the present instance it did not strike me as at all essential that I should find any specimens of the genus *Lilium*. One of the humbler representatives of the great and noble family of the *Liliaceæ* — the pretty clintonia, now a little out of season, or even the Indian cucumber-root — would come fairly within the spirit of the text; while, if worst came to worst, there would certainly be no scarcity of grass, itself nothing but a kind of degenerate lily, if some recent theories may be trusted.

I followed the highway for a mile or two, and then took a wood-road (a "cart-path" I should call it, if I dared to speak in my own tongue wherein I was born) running into the forest on the left. This brought me before long to a "pair of bars," over which I clambered into a grassy field, the first of the two ancient clearings I had come out to see. The scanty acres must have been

wrested from the encompassing forest at no small cost of patience and hard labor; and after all, they had proved not to pay for their tillage. A waste of energy, as things now looked; but who is to judge of such matters? It is not given to every man to see the work of his hands established. A good many of us, I suspect, might be thankful to know that anything we have ever done would be found worthy of mention fifty years hence, though the mention were only by way of pointing a moral.

The old barn was long ago blown down, and as I mounted the fence a woodchuck went scampering out of sight among the timbers. The place was not entirely uninhabited, as it seemed, in spite of appearances: and as I turned toward the house, the door of which stood uninvitingly open, there sat a second woodchuck in the doorway, facing me, intent and motionless, full of wonderment, no doubt, at the unspeakable impertinence of such an intrusion. I was glad to see *him*, at any rate, and made haste to tell him so; greeting him in the rather unceremonious language wherewith the now famous titmouse is said to have

addressed our foremost American gentleman and philosopher: —

> "Good day, good sir!
> Fine afternoon, old passenger!
> Happy to meet you in these places."

But the churlish fellow had no notion of doing the honors, and by the time I had advanced two or three paces he whisked about and vanished inside the door. "Well done!" I thought. "Great is evolution. Woodchucks used to be cave-dwellers, but they are getting to live above ground, like the rest of us. So does history repeat itself. Who knows how soon they may be putting up cottages on their own account?" Perhaps I gave the creature more credit than really belonged to him. I followed him into the house, but he was nowhere to be seen, and it is not unlikely that he lived in a cave, after all. Nearly half the flooring had rotted away, and there was nothing to hinder his getting into the cellar. He may have taken the old farmhouse as a convenient portico for his burrow, a sort of storm-porch, as it were. In his eyes this may be the final end and aim, the teleological purpose, of all such board-and-shingle

edifices. Mr. Ruskin seems to hold that a house falls short of its highest usefulness until it has become a ruin; and who knows but woodchucks may be of the same opinion?

This particular house was in two parts, one of them considerably more ancient than the other. This older portion it was, of which the floor had so badly (or so well) fallen into decay; while the ceiling, as if in a spirit of emulation, had settled till it described almost a semicircle of convexity. To look at it, one felt as if the law of gravity were actually being imposed upon.

It must have marked an epoch in the history of the household, this doubling of its quarters. Things were looking well with the man. His crops were good, his family increasing; his wife had begun to find the house uncomfortably small; they could afford to enlarge it. Hence this addition, this "new part," as no doubt they were in the habit of calling it, with pardonable satisfaction. It was more substantially built than the original dwelling, and possessed, what I dare say its mistress had set her heart upon, one plastered room. The "new part"!

How ironical the words sounded, as I repeated them to myself! If things would only stay new, or if it were men's houses only that grew old!

The people who lived here had little occasion to hang their walls with pictures. When they wanted something to look at, they had but to go to the window and gaze upon the upper slopes of Mount Lafayette and Mount Cannon, rising in beauty beyond the intervening forest. But every New England woman must have a bit of flower garden, no matter what her surroundings; and even here I was glad to notice, just in front of the door, a clump of cinnamon rose-bushes, all uncared for, of course, but flourishing as in a kind of immortal youth (this old-fashioned rose must be one of Time's favorites), and just now bright with blossoms. For sentiment's sake I plucked one, thinking of the hands that did the same years ago, and ere this, in all likelihood, were under the sod; thinking, too, of other hands, long, long vanished, and of a white rose-bush that used to stand beside another door.

On both sides of the house were apple-

trees, a few of them still in good trim, but the greater number decrepit after years of buffeting by mountain storms. A phœbe sat quietly on the ridge-pole, and a chipper was singing from the orchard. What knew they of time, or of time's mutations? The house might grow old, — the house and the trees; but if the same misfortune ever befalls phœbes and sparrows, we are, fortunately, none the wiser. To human eyes they are always young and fresh, like the buttercups that bespangled the grass before me, or like the sun that shone brightly upon the tranquil scene.

Turning away from the house and the grassy field about it, I got over a stone wall into a pasture fast growing up to wood: spruces, white pines, red pines, paper birches, and larches, with a profusion of meadow-sweet sprinkled everywhere among them. A nervous flicker started at my approach, stopped for an instant to reconnoitre, and then made off in haste. A hermit thrush was singing, and the bird that is called the "preacher" — who takes no summer vacation, but holds forth in "God's first temple" for the seven days of every week

— was delivering his homily with all earnestness. He *must* preach, it seemed, whether men would hear or forbear. He had already announced his text, but I could not certainly make out what it was. "Here we have no continuing city," perhaps; or it might have been, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity." It should have been one of these, or so I thought; but, as all church-goers must have observed, the connection between text and sermon is sometimes more or less recondite, and once in a while, like the doctrine of the sermon itself, requires to be taken on faith. In the present instance, indeed, as no doubt in many others, the pew was quite as likely to be at fault as the pulpit. The red-eye's eloquence was never very persuasive to my ear. Its short sentences, its tiresome upward inflections, its everlasting repetitiousness, and its sharp, querulous tone long since became to me an old story; and I have always thought that whoever dubbed this vireo the "preacher" could have had no very exalted opinion of the clergy.

I stayed not to listen, therefore, but kept on through the wood, while a purple finch

pitched a tune on one side of the path (he appeared to feel no compunctions about interrupting the red-eye's exhortation), and a squirrel sprung his rattle on the other; and presently I came to the second farm: a large clearing, bounded by the forest on all hands, but after these many years still yielding a very respectable hay-crop (so does the good that men do live after them), and with a house and barn still standing at the lower end. I reached the house just in time to escape a shower, making an enforced obeisance as I entered. It was but the ghost of a dwelling, — the door off its hinges, and no glass in the four small windows; but it had a substantial quality about it, notwithstanding, as a not very tall man was liable at any moment to be reminded should he carry himself a trifle too proudly under the big unhewn timbers. It is better to stoop than to bump your head, they seemed to be saying. Hither came no tourists but the rabbits; and they, it was plain, were not so much tourists as permanent residents. As I looked at the blank walls and door-posts, after a fortnight's experience among the mountains, I felt grateful

at the sight of boards on which Brown of Boston and Smith of Smithfield had not yet inscribed their illustrious names. I had left the city in search of rest and seclusion. For the time, in the presence of Nature herself, I would gladly have forgotten the very existence of my all-too-famous countrymen; and I rejoiced accordingly to have found one lonely spot to which their restless feet had not yet penetrated. Tall grass grew untrodden quite up to the door-sill; raspberry vines thrust their arms in at the paneless windows; there was neither paint nor plastering; and the tiny cupboard was so bare that it set my irreverent fancy to quoting Mother Goose in the midst of my most serious moralizings.

The owner of this farm, like his neighbor, had planted an apple orchard, and his wife a patch of cinnamon roses; and, not to treat one better than another, I picked a rose here also. There is no lover of flowers but likes to have his garden noticed, and the good housewife would have been pleased, I knew, could she have seen me looking carefully for her handsomest and sweetest bud.

By this time the shower was over, and a song-sparrow was giving thanks. I might never have another opportunity to follow up an old forest path, of which I had heard vague reports as leading from this point to the railway. "It starts from the upper corner of the farm," my informant had said. To the upper corner I went, therefore, through the rank, wet grass. But I found no sign of what I was looking for, and with some heartfelt but unreportable soliloquizings, to the effect that a countryman's directions, like dreams, are always to be read backwards, I started straight down toward the lower corner, saying to myself that I ought to have had the wit to take that course in the beginning. Sure enough, the path was there, badly overgrown with bushes and young trees, but still traceable. A few rods, and I came to the brook. The bridge was mostly gone, as I had been forewarned it probably would be, but a single big log answered a foot passenger's requirements. Once across the bridge, however, I could discover no sign of a trail. But what of that? The sun was shining; I had only to keep it at my back, and I was sure to

bring up at the railroad. So I set out, and for a while traveled on bravely. Then I began to bethink myself that I was not going up-hill quite so fast as it seemed I ought to be doing. Was I really approaching the railway, after all? Or had I started in a wrong direction (being in the woods at the time), and was I heading along the mountain-side in such a course that I might walk all night, and all the while be only plunging deeper and deeper into the forest? The suggestion was not pleasurable. If I could only see the mountain! But the thick foliage put that out of the question.

After a short debate with myself I concluded to be prudent, and make my way back to the brook while I still had the sun to guide me; for I now called to mind the showeriness of the day, and the strong likelihood that the sky might at any moment be overcast. Even as things were, there was no assurance that I might not strike the brook at some distance from the bridge, and so at some distance from the trail, with no means of determining whether it was above or below me. I began my retreat, and pretty soon, luckily or unluckily, — I

am not yet certain which, — in some unaccountable manner my feet found themselves again in the path.

Now, then, I would carry out my original intention, and I turned straight about. For a while the path held clear. Then it was blocked by a big tree that had toppled into it lengthwise. I must go round the obstruction, and pick up the trail at the other end. But the trail would not be picked up. It had faded out or run into the ground. Finally, when I was just on the point of owning myself beaten, my eyes all at once fell upon it, running along before me. A second experience of the same kind set me thinking how long it would take to go a mile or two at this rate (it was already half past four o'clock), even if I did not in the end lose my way altogether. But I kept on till I was stopped, not by a single windfall, but by a tangle of half a dozen. This time I hunted for a continuation of the path on the further side till I was out of patience, and then determined to be done with the foolish business, and go back by the way I had come. A very sensible resolve, but when I came to put it into execution it

turned out to be too late. The path was lost entirely. I must fall back upon the sun; and if the truth is to be told, I commenced feeling slightly uncomfortable. The bushes were wet; my clothing was drenched; I had neither compass nor matches; it certainly would be anything but agreeable to spend the night in the forest.

Happily there was, for the present, no great danger of matters coming to such a pass. If the sun would only shine for half an hour longer I could reach the brook (I could probably reach it without the sun), and even if I missed the bridge I could follow the stream out of the woods before dark. I was not frightened, but I was beginning to tremble lest I should be. The loss of the path was in itself little to worry about. But what if I should lose my wits also, as many a man had done in circumstances no worse, and with consequences most disastrous? Unpleasant stories came into my head, and I remember repeating to myself more than once (candor is better than felicity of phrase), "Be careful, now; don't get rattled!" Then, having thus

pulled myself together, as an Englishman would say, I faced the sun and began "stepping westward," though with no thought of Wordsworth's poem. A spectator might have suspected that if I was not "rattled," I was at least not far from it. "Now who is this," he might have queried,

> "whose sore task
> Does not divide the Sunday from the week?"

Meanwhile I was, of course, on the lookout for any signs of the missing path, and after a time I descried in the distance, on one side, what looked like a patch of bushes growing in the midst of the forest. I made for it, and, as I expected, found myself once more on the trail. This time I held it, reached the bridge, crossed it, and, still keeping up my pace, was presently out in the sunshine of the old farm, startling a brood of young partridges on the way. Happy birds! *They* were never afraid of passing a night in the woods. A most absurd notion! But man, as he is the strongest of all animals, so is he also the weakest and most defenseless.

This last reflection is an afterthought, I freely acknowledge. At the moment I was

taken up with the peacefulness of the pastoral scene into which I had so happily emerged, and was in no mood to envy anybody. How bright and cheerful the ragworts and buttercups looked, and what sweet and homelike music the robin made, singing from one of the apple-trees! The cool north wind wafted the spicy odor of the cinnamon roses to my nostrils; but — alas for the prosaic fact! — the same cool wind struck through my saturated garments, bidding me move on. The pessimistic preacher was right when he said, "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." I wonder whether he was ever bewildered in a dark wood. From boyhood I have loved the forest, with its silence, its shadows, and its deep isolation, but for the present I had had my fill of such mercies.

As I came out upon the highway, it occurred to me what Emerson says of Thoreau, — that "he could not bear to hear the sound of his own steps, and therefore never willingly walked in the road." My own taste, I was obliged to admit, was somewhat less fastidious. Indeed, my

boots, soaked through and through as they were, made very grateful music striking along the gravel. And after supper, while walking back and forth upon the piazza, in all the luxury of slippers and a winter overcoat, I turned more than once from the glories of the sunset to gaze upon the black slope of Lafayette, thinking within myself how much less comfortable I should be up yonder in the depths of the forest, so dark and wet, without company, without fire, without overcoat, and without supper. After all, mere animal comfort is not to be despised. Let us be thankful, I said, for the good things of life, of no matter what grade; yes, though they be only a change of clothing and a summer hotel.

It was laughable how my quiet ramble had turned out. My friend, the red-eyed vireo, may or may not have stuck to his text; but if he had seen me in the midst of my retreat, dashing through the bushes and clambering over the fallen trees, he certainly never would have guessed mine. "Consider the lilies," indeed! He was more likely to think of a familiar Old Testament scripture: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth."

A PITCH-PINE MEDITATION.

So waved the pine-tree through my thought.
EMERSON.

IN outward, every-day affairs, in what we foolishly call real life, man is a stickler for regularity, a devout believer in the maxim, "Order is heaven's first law." He sets his house at right angles with the street; lays out his grounds in the straightest of straight lines, or in the most undeviating of curves; selects his shade-trees for their trim, geometrical habit; and, all in all, carries himself as if precision and conformity were the height of virtue. Yet this same man, when he comes to deal with pictorial representations, makes up his judgment according to quite another standard; finding nothing picturesque in tidy gardens and shaven lawns, discarding without hesitation every well-rounded, symmetrical tree, delighting in disorder and disproportion, loving a ruin better than the best appointed

palace, and a tumble-down wall better than the costliest and stanchest of new-laid masonry. It is hard to know what to think of an inconsistency like this. Why should taste and principle be thus opposed to each other, as if the same man were half Philistine, half Bohemian? Can this strong æsthetic preference for imperfection be based upon some permanent, universal law, or is it only a passing whim, the fashion of an hour?

Whatever we may say of such a problem, — and where one knows nothing, it is perhaps wisest to say nothing, — we may surely count it an occasion for thankfulness that a thing so common as imperfection should have at least its favorable side. Music would soon become tame, if not intolerable, without here and there a discord; and who knows how stupid life itself might prove without some slight admixture of evil? From my study-windows I can see sundry of the newest and most commodious mansions in town; but I more often look, not at them, but at a certain dilapidated old house, blackening for want of paint, and fast falling into decay, but with one

big elm before the door. I have no hankerings to live in it; as a dwelling-place, I should no doubt prefer one of the more modern establishments; but for an object to look at, give me the shanty.

Human nature is nothing if not paradoxical. In its eyes everything is both good and bad; and for my own part, I sometimes wonder whether this may not be the sum of all wisdom, — to find everything good in its place, and everything bad out of its place.

Thoughts like these suggest themselves as I look at the pitch-pine, which, to speak only of such trees as grow within the range of my own observation, is the one irregular member of the family of cone-bearers. The white or Weymouth pine, the hemlock, the cedars, the spruces, the fir, and the larch, these are all, in different ways, of a decidedly symmetrical turn. Each of them has its own definite plan, and builds itself up in fastidious conformity therewith, except as untoward outward conditions may now and then force an individual into some abnormal peculiarity. And all of them, it need not be said, have the defect of this

quality. They are not without charm, not even the black spruce, while the Weymouth pine and the hemlock are often of surpassing magnificence and beauty; but a punctilious adherence to rule must of necessity be attended with a corresponding absence of freedom and variety. The pitch-pine, on the other hand, if it works upon any set scheme, as no doubt it does, has the grace to keep it out of sight. Its gift is genius rather than talent. It has an air, as genius always has, of achieving its results without effort or premeditation. Its method is that of spontaneity; its style, that of the picturesque-homely, so dear to the artistic temperament. Its whole make-up is consistent with this germinal or controlling idea. Angular in outline, rough and ragged in its bole, with its needles stiff and its cones hard and sharp, it makes no attempt at gracefulness, yet by virtue of its very waywardness it becomes, as if in spite of itself, more attractive than any of its relatives.

The Puritans of New England are mostly dead; the last of their spiritual descendants, we may fear, will soon be dead likewise; but as long as *Pinus rigida* covers

the sandy knolls of Massachusetts, the sturdy, uncompromising, independent, economical, indefatigable, all-enduring spirit of Puritanism will be worthily represented in this its sometime thriving-place.

For the pitch-pine's noblest qualities are, after all, not artistic, but moral. Such unalterable contentment, such hardiness and persistency, are enough to put the stoutest of us to shame. Once give it root, and no sterility of soil can discourage it. Everything else may succumb, but it — it and the gray birch — will make shift to live. Like the resin that exudes from it, having once taken hold, it has no thought of letting go. It is never "planted by the rivers of water," but all the same its leaf does not wither. No summer so hot and dry, no winter so cold and wet, but it keeps its perennial green. What cannot be done in one year may, perchance, be accomplished in three or four. It spends several seasons in ripening its fruit. Think of an apple-tree thus patient!

The pitch-pine is beautiful to look at, and "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteous-

ness," but it would be a shame not to add that it is also most excellent to smell of. If I am to judge, scarcely any odor wears better than this of growing turpentine. There is something unmistakably clean and wholesome about it. The very first whiff savors of salubrity. "The belief in the good effects of pine forests in cases of phthisis is quite unanimous" (so I read the other day in a scientific journal), "and the clinical evidence in favor of their beneficial influence is unquestioned." Who can tell whether our New England climate, with all its consumptive provocations, might not be found absolutely unendurable but for the amelioration furnished by this generously diffused terebinthine prophylactic?

When all is said, however, nothing else about the pitch-pine ever affects me so deeply as its behavior after man has done his worst upon it. It would appear to have some vague sense of immortality, some gropings after a resurrection. The tree was felled in the autumn, and the trunk cut up ignominiously into cord-wood; but in the spring the prostrate logs begin to put forth scattered tufts of bright green leaves,—life

still working under the ribs of death, — while the stump, whether "through the scent of water" I cannot say, is perhaps sending up fresh shoots, — a piece of *post-mortem* hopefulness the like of which no white pine, for all its seemingly greater vitality, was ever known to exhibit. But leaves and shoots alike come to nothing. If a pitch-pine die, it shall not live again. The wood's blind impulses, if not false in themselves, were at least falsely interpreted. Alas! alas! who has not found it so? What seemed like the prophetic stirrings of a new life were only the last flickerings of a lamp that was going out.

ESOTERIC PERIPATETICISM.

I walk about; not to and from. — CHARLES LAMB.

TAKING a walk is something different from traveling afoot. The latter I may do when on my way to the cars or the shop; but my neighbor, seeing me at such times, never says to himself, "Mr. —— is taking a walk." He knows I cannot be doing that, so long as I am walking for the sake of getting somewhere. Even the common people understand that utilitarianism has nothing to do with the true peripatetic philosophy.

The disciples of this philosophy, the noble fraternity of saunterers, among whom I modestly enroll myself, are not greatly concerned with any kind of merely physical activity. They believe that everything has both a lower and a higher use; and that in the order of evolution the lower precedes the higher. Time was when walking — going erect on one's hind limbs — was a rare accomplishment, sufficient of itself to

confer distinction. Little by little this accomplishment became general, and for this long time now it has been universal; yet even to the present day it is not quite natural; else why does every human infant still creep on all-fours till it is taught otherwise? But of all who practise the art, only here and there a single individual has divined its loftier use and significance. The rest are still in the materialistic stage — pedestrians simply. In their view walking is only a convenience, or perhaps I should say an inconvenience; a cheap device for getting from one place to another. They resort to it for business, or, it may be, for health. Of strolling as a means of happiness they have scarcely so much as heard. They belong to the great and fashionable sect of the wise and prudent; and from all such the true peripatetic philosophy is forever hidden. We who are in the secret would gladly publish it if we could; but by its very nature the doctrine is esoteric.

Whoso would be initiated into its mysteries must first of all learn how not to be in a hurry. Life is short, it is true, and time is precious; but a day is worth noth-

ing of itself. It is like money,—good only for what it will buy. One must not play the miser, even with time. "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." Who does not know men so penurious of minutes, so everlastingly preoccupied, that they seldom spend an hour to any good purpose,—confirming the paradox of Jesus, "He that loveth his life shall lose it"? And between a certain two sisters, was not the verdict given in favor of the one who (if we take the other's word for it) was little better than an idler? The saunterer has laid to heart this lesson. On principle, he devotes a part of his time to what his virtuous townsmen call doing nothing. "What profit hath a man of all his labor?" A pertinent inquiry; but I am not aware that the author of it ever suggested any similar doubt as to the net results of well-directed idleness. A laborious, painstaking spirit is commendable in its place; it would go hard with the world to get on without it; but the fact remains that some of the very best things of this life—things unseen and (therefore) eternal—are never to be come at industriously.

It is useless to chase them. We can only put ourselves in their way, and be still. The secret is as old as mysticism itself: if the vision tarry, wait for it.

Walking, then, as adepts use the word, is not so much a physical as a spiritual exercise. And if any be disposed to look askance at this form of expression, as if there were possibly a suggestion of profanity about it, they will please bethink themselves of an ancient sacred book (to which, according to some friendly critics, I am strangely fond of referring), wherein is narrated the history of a man who went out into the fields at eventide to meditate. *He* could never have misunderstood our speech, nor dreamed of its needing justification. And your true saunterers of the present day, no matter what their creed, are of Isaac's kin, — devout and imaginative souls, who may now and then be forced to cry with the Psalmist, "O that I had wings!" but who, in all ordinary circumstances, are able to *walk* away and be at rest. Like the patriarch, they have accustomed their feet to serve them as ministers of grace.

It must be a bad day indeed when, on re-

treating to the woods or the fields, we find it impossible to leave the wearisome world — yes, and our more wearisome selves, also — behind us. As a rule, this result is not the better attained by quickening the gait. We may allow for exceptions, of course, cases in which a counter-excitement may peradventure be of use; but most often it is better to seek quietness of heart at a quiet pace; to steal away from our persecutors, rather than to invite pursuit by too evident a purpose of escape. The lazy motion is of itself a kind of spiritual sedative. As we proceed, gazing idly at the sky, or with our attention caught by some wayside flower or passing bird, the mind grows placid, and, like smooth water, receives into itself the image of heaven. What a benediction of repose falls upon us sometimes from an old tree, as we pass under it! So self-poised it seems; so alive, and yet so still! It was planted here before we were born. It will be green and flourishing long after we are dead. In it we may behold a perfect illustration of the dignity and peace of a life undeviatingly obedient to law, — the law of its own being; never in haste, never at a

loss, but in every fibre doing, day by day, its appropriate work. Sunshine and rain, heat and cold, calm and storm, — all minister to its necessities. It has only to stand in its place and grow; happy in springtime, with its buds and leaves; happy in autumn, with its fruit; happy, too, in winter, — repining not when forced to wait through months of bareness and dearth for the touch of returning warmth. Enviable tree! As we contemplate it, we feel ourselves rebuked, and, at the same time, comforted. We, also, will be still, and let the life that is in us work itself out to the appointed end.

The seeing eye is a gift so unusual that whoever accustoms himself to watch what passes around him in the natural world is sure to be often entertained by the remarks, complimentary and otherwise, which such an idiosyncrasy calls forth. Some of his neighbors pity him as a ne'er-do-well, while others devoutly attribute to him a sort of superhuman faculty. If only *they* had such eyes! But, alas! they go into the woods, and they see nothing. Meanwhile the object of their envy knows well enough that

his own vision is but rudimentary. He catches a glimpse now and then, — nothing more. Like his neighbors, he, too, prays for sight. Sooner or later, however, he discovers that it is a blessing to be able on occasion to leave one's scientific senses at home. For here, again, surprising as it may seem, it is necessary to be on our guard against a superserviceable activity. There are times when we go out-of-doors, not after information, but in quest of a mood. Then we must not be over-observant. Nature is coy; she appreciates the difference between an inquisitor and a lover. The curious have their reward, no doubt, but her best gifts are reserved for suitors of a more sympathetic turn. And unless it be here and there some creature altogether devoid of poetic sensibility, some "fingering slave," —

> "One who would peep and botanize
> Upon his mother's grave," —

unless it be such a person as this, too poor to be conscious of his own poverty, there can be no enthusiastic student of natural history but has found out for himself the truth and importance of the paradoxical

caution now suggested. One may become so zealous a botanist as almost to cease to be a man. The shifting panorama of the heavens and the earth no longer appeals to him. He is now a specialist, and go where he will, he sees nothing but specimens. Or he may give himself up to ornithology, till eye and ear grow so abnormally sensitive that not a bird can move or twitter but he is instantly aware of it. He *must* attend, whether he will or no. So long as this servitude lasts, it is idle to go afield in pursuit of joys "high and aloof," such as formerly awaited him in lonesome places. Better betake himself to city streets or a darkened room. For myself, I thankfully bear testimony that when I have been thus under the tyranny of my own senses I have found no more certain means of temporary deliverance than to walk in the early evening. Indeed, I have been ready, many a time, to exclaim with Wordsworth,—

"Hail, Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour!"

Then the eye has no temptation to busy itself with petty details; "day's mutable distinctions" are removed from sight, and the mind is left undistracted to rise, if it

can, into communion with the spirit of the scene.

After all, it is next to nothing we are able to tell of the pleasures of such fellowship. We cannot define them to ourselves, — though they are "felt in the blood and felt along the heart," — much less to another. Least of all need we attempt to explain them to any Philistine; the walls of whose house are likely enough hung with "chromos," but who stares at you for a fool or a sentimentalist (which comes, perhaps, to nearly the same thing), when he catches you standing still before one of Nature's pictures. How shall one blest with a feeling for the woods put into language the delight he experiences in sauntering along their shady aisles? He enjoys the stillness, the sense of seclusion, the flicker of sunlight and shadow, the rustle of leaves, the insect's hum, the passing of the chance butterfly, the chirp of the bird, or its full-voiced song, the tracery of lichens on rock and tree, the tuft of ferns, the carpet of moss, the brightness of blossom and fruit, — all the numberless sights and sounds of the forest; but it is not any of these, nor

all of them together, that make the glory of the place. It is the wood — and this is something more than the sum of all its parts — which lays hold upon him, taking him, as it were, out of the world and out of himself. Let practical people sneer, and the industrious frown; we who retain our relish for these natural and innocent felicities may well enough be indifferent to neighborly comments. Whatever worldlings may think, the hour is not wasted that brings with it tranquillity of mind and an uplifting of the heart. We seem to be going nowhere and looking for nothing? Yes; but one may be glad to visit the Land of Beulah, though he have no special errand thither. Who ever saw a child but was fond of an idle hour in the woods? And for my part, while I have with me the children (and the dogs and the poets) I count myself in excellent company; for the time, at least, I can do without what is vulgarly esteemed good society. A man to whom a holiday affords no pleasure is already as good as dead; nothing will save him but to be born again. We have heard of convicts so wonted to prison cells that

they could feel at home nowhere else; and we have known men of business whose feet, when they stopped going the regular humdrum round, knew no other course to take but to steer straight for the grave. It behooves us to heed the warning of such examples, and now and then to be idle betimes, lest the capacity for idleness be extirpated by disuse.

The practice of sauntering may especially be recommended as a corrective of the modern vice of continual reading. For too many of us it has come to be well-nigh impossible to sit down by ourselves without turning round instinctively in search of a book or a newspaper. The habit indicates a vacancy of mind, a morbid intellectual restlessness, and may not inaptly be compared with that incessant delirious activity which those who are familiar with death-bed scenes know so well as a symptom of approaching dissolution. Possibly the two cases are not in all respects analogous. Books are an inestimable boon; let me never be without the best of them, both old and new. Still, one would fain have an occasional thought of one's own, even

though, as the common saying is, it be nothing to speak of. Meditation is an old-fashioned exercise; the very word is coming to have an almost archaic sound; but neither the word nor the thing will altogether pass into forgetfulness so long as the race of saunterers — the spiritual descendants of Isaac — continue to inherit the earth.

There is little danger that the lives of any of us will be too solitary or lived at too leisurely a rate. The world grows busier and busier. Those whose passion for Nature is strongest and most deep-seated are driven to withhold from her all but the odds and ends of the day. We rebel sometimes; the yoke grows unendurable; come what may, we will be quit of it; but the existing order of things proves too strong for us, and anon we settle back into the old bondage. And perhaps it is better so. Even the most simple and natural delights are best appreciated when rarely and briefly enjoyed. So I persuade myself that, all in all, it is good for me to have only one or two hours a day for the woods. Human nature is weak; who knows but I might

grow lazy, were I my own master? At least, "the fine point of seldom pleasure" would be blunted.

The ideal plan would include two walks: one in the morning for observation, with every sense alert; the other toward night, for a mood of "wise passiveness," wherein Nature should be left free to have her own way with the heart and the imagination. Then the laureate's prayer might be fulfilled: —

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell;
> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music, as before."

But this strict division of time is too often out of the question, and we must contrive, as best we can, to unite the two errands, — study and reverie: using our eyes and ears, but not abusing them; and, on the other hand, giving free play to fancy and imagination, without permitting ourselves to degenerate into impotent dreamers. Every walker ought to be a faithful student of at least one branch of natural history, not omitting Latin names and the very latest discoveries and theories. But, withal, let

him make sure that his acquaintance with out-of-door life is sympathetic, and not merely curious or scientific. All honor to the new science and its votaries; we run small risk of too much learning; but it should be kept in mind that the itch for finding out secrets is to be accounted noble or ignoble, according as the spirit that prompts the research is liberal or petty. Curiosity and love of the truth are not yet identical, however it may flatter our self-esteem to ignore the distinction. One may spend one's days and nights in nothing else but in hearing or telling some new thing, and after all be no better than a gossip. It would prove a sorry exchange for such of us as have entered, in any degree, into the feeling of Wordsworth's lines, —

> "To me, the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," —

and I believe the capacity for such moods to be less uncommon than many suppose, — it would be a sorry bargain, I say, for us to lose this sensitiveness to the charm of living beauty, though meanwhile we were to grow wiser than all the moderns touching the morphology and histology of every blossom under the sun.

"Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail against her beauty?"

Not we, certainly; but we will be bold to add, with Tennyson himself, —

"Let her know her place;
She is the second, not the first."

In treating a theme of this kind, it is hard not to violate Nature's own method, and fall into a strain of exhortation. Our intercourse with her is so good and wholesome, such an inexhaustible and ever-ready resource against the world's trouble and unrest, that we would gladly have everybody to share it. We say, over and over, with Emerson, —

"If I could put my woods in song,
And tell what 's there enjoyed,
All men would to my gardens throng,
And leave the cities void."

But this may not be. At best, words can only hint at sensations; and the hint can be taken only by as many as are predestined to hear it. As I have said, the doctrine is esoteric. How are those who have never felt the like to understand the satisfaction with which I recall a certain five or ten minutes of a cool morning in May, a year

or more ago? I was drawing towards home, after a jaunt of an hour or two, when I came suddenly into a sheltered and sunny nook, where a bed of the early saxifrage was already in full bloom, while a most exquisite little bee-fly of a beautiful shade of warm brown was hovering over it, draining the tiny, gold-lined chalices, one by one, with its long proboscis, which looked precisely like the bill of a humming-bird. An ordinary picture enough, as far as words go, — only a little sunshine, a patch of inconspicuous and common flowers, and a small Bombylian without even the distinction of bright colors. True; but my spirit drank a nectar sweeter than any the insect was sipping. And though, as a rule, an experience of this sort were perhaps better left unspoken, —

"A thought of private recollection, sweet and still,"

yet the mention of it can do no harm, while it illustrates what I take to be one of the principal advantages of the saunterer's condition. His treasures are never far to seek. His delight is in Nature herself, rather than in any of her more unusual manifestations. He is not of that large and increasingly

fashionable class who fancy themselves lovers of Nature, while in fact they are merely admirers, more or less sincere, of fine scenery. Not that anything is too beautiful for our rambler's appreciation: he has an eye for the best that earth and heaven can offer; he knows the exhilaration of far-reaching prospects; but he is not dependent upon such extraordinary favors of Providence. He has no occasion to run hither and thither in search of new and strange sights. The old familiar pastures; the bushy lane, in which his feet have loitered year after year, ever since they began to go alone; an unfrequented road; a wooded slope, or a mossy glen; the brook of his boyish memories; if need be, nothing but a clump of trees or a grassy meadow, — these are enough for his pleasure. Fortunate man! Who should be happy, if not he? Out of his own doorway he steps at will into the Elysian fields.

BUTTERFLY PSYCHOLOGY.

Gay creatures of the element,
That in the colors of the rainbow live. — MILTON.

Speak to me as to thy thinkings. — SHAKESPEARE.

IT happened to me once to spend a long summer afternoon under a linden-tree, reading "Middlemarch." The branches were loaded with blossoms, and the heavy perfume attracted the bees from far and near, insomuch that my ears were all the time full of their humming. Butterflies also came, though in smaller numbers, and silently. Whenever I looked up from my book I was sure to find at least one or two fluttering overhead. They were mostly of three of our larger sorts, — the Turnus, the Troilus, and the Archippus (what noble names!), beautifully contrasted in color. The Turnus specimens were evidently the remnant of a brood which had nearly passed away; their tattered wings showed that they had been exposed to the wear and tear of a long life, as butterflies reckon.

Some of them were painful to look at, and I remember one in particular, so maimed and helpless that, with a sudden impulse of compassion, I rose and stepped upon it. It seemed an act of mercy to send the wretched cripple after its kindred. As I looked at these loiterers, with their frayed and faded wings, — some of them half gone, — I found myself, almost before I knew it, thinking of Dorothea Brooke, of whose lofty ideals, bitter disappointments, and partial joys I was reviewing the story. After all, was there really any wide difference between the two lives? One was longer, the other shorter; but only as one dewdrop outlasts another on the grass.

> "A moment's halt, a momentary taste
> Of Being from the well amid the waste,
> And lo! the phantom caravan has reach'd
> The Nothing it set out from."

Then I fell to musing, as I had often done before, upon the mystery of an insect's life and mind.

This tiger swallow-tail, that I had just trodden into the ground, — what could have been its impressions of this curious world whereinto it had been ushered so uncere-

moniously, and in which its day had been so transient? A month ago, a little more or a little less, it had emerged from its silken shroud, dried its splendid party-colored wings in the sun, and forthwith had gone sailing away, over the pasture and through the wood, in quest of something, it could hardly have known what. Nobody had welcomed it. When it came, the last of its ancestors were already among the ancients. Without father or mother, without infancy or childhood, it was born full-grown, and set out, once for all, upon an independent adult existence. What such a state of uninitiated, uninstructed being may be like let those imagine who can.

It was born adult, I say; but at the same time, it was freer from care than the most favored of human children. No one ever gave it a lesson or set it a task. It was never restrained nor reproved; neither its own conscience nor any outward authority ever imposed the lightest check upon its desires. It had nobody's pleasure to think of but its own; for as it was born too late to know father or mother, so also it died too soon to see its own offspring. It made

no plans, needed no estate, was subject to no ambition. Summer was here when it came forth, and summer was still here when it passed away. It was born, it lived upon honey, it loved, and it died. Happy and brief biography!

Happy and brief; but what a multitude of questions are suggested by it! Did the creature know anything of its preëxistence, either in the chrysalis or earlier? If so, did it look back upon that far-away time as upon a golden age? Or was it really as careless as it seemed, neither brooding over the past nor dreaming of the future? Was it aware of its own beauty, seeing itself some day reflected in the pool as it came to the edge to drink? Did it recognize smaller butterflies — the white and the yellow, and even the diminutive "copper" — as poor relations; felicitating itself, meanwhile, upon its own superior size, its brilliant orange-red eye-spots, and its gorgeous tails? Did it mourn over its faded broken wings as age came on, or when an unexpected gust drove it sharply against a thorn? Or was it enabled to take every mischance and change in a philosophical spirit, perceiving all such

evils to have their due and necessary place in the order of Nature? Was it frightened when the first night settled down upon it, — the horrible black darkness, that seemed to be making a sudden end of all things? As it saw a caterpillar here and there, did it ever suspect any relationship between the hairy crawling thing and itself; or would it have been mortally offended with any profane lepidopteran Darwin who should have hinted at such a possibility?

The Antiopa butterfly, according to some authorities a near relative of the tiger swallow-tail, has long been especially attractive to me because of its habit of passing the winter in a state of hibernation, and then reappearing upon the wing before the very earliest of the spring flowers. A year ago, Easter fell upon the first day of April. I spent the morning out-of-doors, hoping to discover some first faint tokens of a resurrection. Nor was I disappointed. In a sunny stretch of the lonely road, I came suddenly upon five of these large "mourning-cloaks," all of them spread flat upon the wet gravel, sucking up the moisture while the sun warmed their wings. What sight

more appropriate for Easter! I thought. These were some who had been dead, and behold, they were alive again.

Then, as before under the linden-tree, I fell to wondering. What were they thinking about, these creatures so lately born a second time? Did they remember their last year's existence? And what could they possibly make of this brown and desolate world, so unlike the lingering autumnal glories in the midst of which, five or six months before, they had "fallen asleep"? Perhaps they had been dreaming. In any event, they could have no idea of the ice and snow, the storms and the frightful cold, through which they had passed. It was marvelous how such frail atoms had withstood such exposure; yet here they were, as good as new, and so happily endowed that they had no need to wait for blossoms, but could draw fresh life from the very mire of the street.

This last trait, so curiously out of character, as it seems to us, suggests one further inquiry: Have butterflies an æsthetic faculty? They appreciate each other's adornments, of course. Otherwise, what becomes

of the accepted doctrine of sexual selection? And if they appreciate each other's beauty, what is to hinder our believing that they enjoy also the bright colors and dainty shapes of the flowers on which they feed? As I came out upon the veranda of a summer hotel, two or three friends exclaimed: "Oh, Mr. ——, you should have been here a few minutes ago; you would have seen something quite in your line. A butterfly was fluttering over the lawn, and noticing what it took for a dandelion, it was just settling down upon it, when lo, the dandelion moved, and proved to be a goldfinch!" Evidently the insect had an eye for color, and was altogether like one of us in its capacity for being deceived.

To butterflies, as to angels, all things are pure. They extract honey from the vilest of materials. But their tastes and propensities are in some respects the very opposite of angelic; being, in fact, thoroughly human. All observers must have been struck with their quite Hibernian fondness for a shindy. Two of the same kind seldom come within hail of each other without a little set-to, just for sociability's sake, as it

were; and I have seen a dozen or more gathered thickly about a precious bit of moist earth, all crowding and pushing for place in a manner not to be outdone by the most patriotic of office-seekers.

It is my private heresy, perhaps, this strong anthropomorphic turn of mind, which impels me to assume the presence of a soul in all animals, even in these airy nothings; and, having assumed its existence, to speculate as to what goes on within it. I know perfectly well that such questions as I have been raising are not to be answered. They are not meant to be answered. But I please myself with asking them, nevertheless, having little sympathy with those precise intellectual economists who count it a waste to let the fancy play with insoluble mysteries. Why is fancy winged, I should like to know, if it is never to disport itself in fields out of which the clumsy, heavy-footed understanding is debarred?

BASHFUL DRUMMERS.

He goes but to see a noise that he heard.
SHAKESPEARE.

AT the back of my father's house were woods, to my childish imagination a boundless wilderness. Little by little I ventured into them, and among my earliest recollections of their sombre and lonesome depths was a long, thunderous, far-away drumming noise, beginning slowly and increasing in speed till the blows became almost continuous. This, somebody told me, was the drumming of the partridge. Now and then, in open spaces in the path, I came upon shallow circular depressions where the bird had been dusting, an operation in which I had often seen our barnyard fowls complacently engaged. At other times I was startled by the sudden whir of the bird's wings as he sprang up at my feet, and went dashing away through the underbrush. I heard with open-mouthed wonder of men who had been known to shoot a bird thus

flying! All in all, the partridge made a great impression upon my boyish mind.

By and by some older companion initiated me into the mystery of setting snares. My attempts were primitive enough, no doubt; but they answered their purpose, taking me into the woods morning and night, in all kinds of weather, and affording me no end of pleasurable excitement. Once in a great while the noose would be displaced (the "slip-noose," we called it, with unsuspected pleonasm), and the barberries gone. At last, after numberless disappointments, I actually found a bird in the snare. The poor captive was still alive, and, as I came up, was making frantic efforts to escape; but I managed to secure him, in spite of my trembling fingers, and then, though the deed looked horribly like murder, I killed him (I would rather not mention how), and carried him home in triumph.

Many years passed, and I became in my own way an ornithologist. One by one I scraped acquaintance with all the common birds of our woods and fields; but the drumming of the partridge (or of the ruffled

grouse, as I now learned to call him) remained a mystery. I read Emerson's description of the "forest-seer:" —

> "He saw the partridge drum in the woods;
> He heard the woodcock's evening hymn;
> He found the tawny thrushes' broods;
> And the shy hawk did wait for him;"

and I thought: "Well, now, I have seen and heard the woodcock at his vespers; I have found the nest of the tawny thrush; the shy hawk has sat still on the branch just over my head; but I have *not* seen the partridge drum in the woods. Why should n't I do that, also?" I made numerous attempts. A bird often drummed in a small wood where I was in the habit of rambling before breakfast. The sound came always from a particular quarter, and probably from a certain stone wall, running over a slight rise of ground near a swamp. The crafty fellow evidently did not mean to be surprised; but I made a careful reconnoissance, and finally hit upon what seemed a feasible point of approach. A rather large boulder offered a little cover, and, after several failures, I one day spied the bird on the wall. He had drummed only a few min-

utes before; but his lookout was most likely sharper than mine. At all events, he dropped off the wall on the further side, and for that time I saw nothing more of him. Nor was I more successful the next time, nor the next. Be as noiseless as I could, the wary creature inevitably took the alarm. To make matters worse, mornings were short and birds were many. One day there were rare visiting warblers to be looked after; another day the gray-cheeked thrushes had dropped in upon us on their way northward, and, if possible, I must hear them sing. Then the pretty blue golden-winged warbler was building her nest, and by some means or other I must find it.

Thus season after season slipped by. Then, in another place, I accidentally passed quite round a drummer. I heard him on the right, and after traveling only a few rods, I heard him on the left. He must be very near me, and not far from the crest of a low hill, over which, as in the former instance, a stone wall ran. He drummed at long intervals, and meanwhile I was straining my eyes and advancing at

a snail's pace up the slope. Happily, the ground was carpeted with pine needles, and comparatively free from brush and dead twigs, those snapping nuisances that so often bring all our patience and ingenuity to nought. A section of the wall came into sight, but I got no glimpse of the bird. Presently I went down upon all fours; then lower yet, crawling instead of creeping, till I could look over the brow of the hill. Here I waited, and had begun to fear that I was once more to have my labor for my pains, when all at once I saw the grouse step from one stone to another. "Now for it!" I said to myself. But the drumming did not follow, and anon I lost sight of the drummer. Again I waited, and finally the fellow jumped suddenly upon a top stone, lifted his wings, and commenced the familiar roll-call. I could see his wings beating against his sides with quicker and quicker strokes; but an unlucky bush was between us, and hoping to better my position, I moved a little to one side. Upon this, the bird became aware of my presence, I think. At least I could see him staring straight at me, and a moment later he

dropped behind the wall; and though I remained motionless till a cramp took me, I heard nothing more. "If it had not been for that miserable bush!" I muttered. But I need not have quarreled with an innocent bush, as if it, any more than myself, had been given a choice where it should grow. A wiser man would have called to mind the old saw, and made the most of "half a loaf."

Another year passed, and another spring came round. Then, on the same hillside, a bird (probably the same individual) was drumming one April morning, and, as my note-book has it, "I came within one" of taking him in the act. I miscalculated his position, however, which, as it turned out, was not upon the wall, but on a boulder surrounded by a few small pine-trees. The rock proved to be well littered, and clearly was the bird's regular resort. "Very good," said I, "I will catch you yet."

Five days later I returned to the charge, and was rewarded by seeing the fellow drum once; but, as before, intervening brush obscured my view. I crept forward, inch by inch, till the top of the boulder

came into sight, and waited, and waited, and waited. At last I pushed on, and lo, the place was deserted. There is a familiar Scripture text that might have been written on purpose for ornithologists: "Let patience have her perfect work."

This was April 14th. On the 19th I made the experiment again. The drummer was at it as I drew near, and fortune favored me at last. I witnessed the performance three times over. Even now, to be sure, the prospect was not entirely clear, but it was better than ever before, and by this time I had learned to be thankful for small mercies. The grouse kept his place between the acts, moving his head a little one way and another, but apparently doing nothing else.

Of course I had in mind the disputed question as to the method by which the drumming noise is produced. It had seemed to me that whoever would settle this point must do it by attending carefully to the first slow beats. This I now attempted, and after one trial was ready, offhand, to accept a theory which heretofore I had scouted; namely, that the bird makes

the sound by striking his wings together over his back. He brought them up, even for the first two or three times, with a quick convulsive movement, and I could almost have made oath that I heard the beat before the wings fell. But fortunately, or unfortunately, I waited till he drummed again; and now I was by no means so positive in my conviction. If an observer wishes to be absolutely sure of a thing, — I have learned this by long experience, — let him look at it once, and forever after shut his eyes! On the whole, I return to my previous opinion, that the sound is made by the downward stroke, though whether against the body or against the air, I will not presume to say.

A man who is a far better ornithologist than I, and who has witnessed this performance under altogether more favorable conditions than I was ever afforded, assures me that his performer *sat down!* My bird took no such ridiculous position. So much, at least, I am sure of.

When he had drummed three times, my partridge quit his boulder (I was near enough to hear him strike the dry leaves),

and after a little walked suddenly into plain sight. We discovered each other at the same instant. I kept motionless, my field-glass up. He made sundry nervous movements, especially of his ruff, and then silently stalked away.

I could not blame him for his lack of neighborliness. If I had been shot at and hunted with dogs as many times as he probably had been, I too might have become a little shy of strangers. To my thinking, indeed, the grouse is one of our most estimable citizens. A liking for the buds of fruit-trees is his only fault (not many of my townsmen have a smaller number, I fancy), and that is one easily overlooked, especially by a man who owns no orchard. Every sportsman tries to shoot him, and every winter does its worst to freeze or starve him; but he continues to flourish. Others may migrate to sunnier climes, or seek safety in the backwoods, but not so the partridge. He was born here, and here he means to stay. What else could be expected of a bird whose notion of a lover's serenade is the beating of a drum?

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